

THE
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NEW SERIES, VOL. I.

Elizabeth Williams

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JULY, 1883.

THE GIANT'S ROBE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'VICE VERSÂ.'

'Now does he feel his title
Hang loose upon him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief!—*Macbeth*.

CHAPTER I.

AN INTERCESSOR.



N the heart of the City, but fended off from the roar and rattle of traffic by a ring of shops, and under the shadow of a smoke-begrimed classical church, stands—or rather stood, for they have removed it recently—the large public school of St. Peter's.

Entering the heavy old gate, against which the shops on both sides huddled close, you passed into the atmosphere of scholastic calm which, during working hours, pervades most places of education, and you saw a long plain block of buildings, within which it was hard to believe, so deep was the silence,

that some hundreds of boys were collected.

Even if you went down the broad stairs to the school entrance

VOL. I.—NO. 1, N. S.

and along the basement, where the bulk of the class-rooms was situated, there was only a faint hum to be heard from behind the numerous doors—until the red-waistcoated porter came out of his lodge and rang the big bell which told that the day's work was over.

Then nervous people who found themselves by any chance in the long dark corridors experienced an unpleasant sensation, as of a demon host in high spirits being suddenly let loose to do their will. The outburst was generally preceded by a dull murmur and rustle, which lasted for a few minutes after the clang of the bell had died away—then door after door opened and hordes of boys plunged out with wild shrieks of liberty, to scamper madly down the echoing flagstones.

For half an hour after that the place was a Babel of unearthly yells, whistles, and scraps of popular songs, with occasional charges and scuffles and a constant tramp of feet.

The higher forms on both the classical and modern sides took no part of course in these exuberances, and went soberly home in twos or threes, as became 'fellows in the Sixth.' But they were in the minority, and the Lower School boys and the 'Remove'—that bodyguard of strong limbs and thick heads which it seemed hopeless to remove any higher—were quite capable of supplying unaided all the noise that might be considered necessary; and, as there was no ill-humour and little roughness in their japes, they were very wisely allowed to let their steam off without interference. It did not last very long, though it died out gradually enough: first the songs and whistles became more isolated and distinct, and the hallooing and tramping less continued, until the *charivari* toned down almost entirely, the frightened silence came stealing back again, and the only sounds at last were the hurried run of the delinquents who had been 'run in' to the detention room, the slow footsteps of some of the masters, and the brooms of the old ladies who were cleaning up.

Such was the case at St. Peter's when this story begins. The stream of boys with shiny black bags had poured out through the gate and swelled the great human river; some of them were perhaps already at home and enlivening their families with the day's experiences, and those who had further to go were probably beguiling the tedium of travel by piling one another up in struggling heaps on the floors of various railway carriages, for the entertainment of those privileged to be their fellow-passengers.

Halfway down the main corridor I have mentioned was the 'Middle-Third' class-room, a big square room with dingy cream-coloured walls, high windows darkened with soot, and a small stained writing-table at one end, surrounded on three sides by ranks of rugged seasoned forms and sloping desks; round the walls were varnished lockers with a number painted on the lid of each, and a big square stove stood in one corner.

The only person in the room just then was the form-master, Mark Ashburn; and he was proposing to leave it almost immediately, for the close air and the strain of keeping order all day had given him a headache, and he was thinking that before walking homeward he would amuse himself with a magazine, or a gossip in the masters' room.

Mark Ashburn was a young man, almost the youngest on the school staff, and very decidedly the best-looking. He was tall and well made, with black hair and eloquent dark eyes, which had the gift of expressing rather more than a rigid examination would have found inside him—just now, for example, a sentimental observer would have read in their glance round the bare deserted room the passionate protest of a soul conscious of genius against the hard fate which had placed him there, whereas he was in reality merely wondering whose hat that was on the row of pegs opposite.

But if Mark was not a genius, there was a brilliancy in his manner that had something very captivating about it; an easy confidence in himself, that had the more merit because it had hitherto met with extremely small encouragement.

He dressed carefully, which was not without effect upon his class, for boys, without being overscrupulous in the matter of their own costume, are apt to be critical of the garments of those in authority over them. To them he was 'an awful swell'; though he was not actually overdressed—it was only that he liked to walk home along Piccadilly with the air of a man who had just left his club and had nothing particular to do.

He was not unpopular with his boys: he did not care twopence about any of them, but he felt it pleasant to be popular, and his careless good-nature secured that result without much effort on his part. They had a great respect for his acquirements too, speaking of him among themselves as 'jolly clever when he liked to show it'; for Mark was not above giving occasional indications of deep learning which were highly impressive. He went out of his way to do it,

and was probably aware that the learning thus suggested would not stand any very severe test; but then there was no one there to apply it.

Any curiosity as to the last hat and coat on the wall was satisfied while he still sat at his desk, for the door, with its upper panels of corrugated glass protected by stout wire network—no needless precaution there—opened just then, and a small boy appeared, looking rather pale and uncomfortable, and holding a long sheet of blue foolscap in one hand.

'Hullo, Langton,' said Mark, as he saw him; 'so it's you who haven't gone yet, eh? How's that?'

'Please, sir,' began the boy, dolorously, 'I've got into an awful row—I'm run in, sir.'

'Ah!' said Mark; 'sorry for you—what is it?'

'Well, I didn't do anything,' said he. 'It was like this. I was going along the passage, and just passing Old Jemmy's—I mean Mr. Shelford's—door, and it was open. And there was a fellow standing outside, a bigger fellow than me, and he caught hold of me by the collar and ran me right in and shut the door and bolted. And Mr. Shelford came at me and boxed my ears, and said it wasn't the first time, and I should have a detention card for it. And so he gave me this, and I'm to go up to the Doctor with it and get it signed when it's done!'

And the boy held out the paper, at the top of which Mark read in old Shelford's tremulous hand—'Langton. 100 lines for outrageous impertinence. J. Shelford.'

'If I go up, you know, sir,' said the boy, with a trembling lip, 'I'm safe for a swishing.'

'Well, I'm afraid you are,' agreed Mark, 'but you'd better make haste, hadn't you? or they'll close the Detention Room, and you'll only be worse off for waiting, you see.'

Mark was really rather sorry for him, though he had, as has been said, no great liking for boys; but this particular one, a round-faced, freckled boy, with honest eyes and a certain refinement in his voice and bearing that somehow suggested that he had a mother or sister who was a gentlewoman, was less objectionable to Mark than his fellows. Still he could not enter into his feelings sufficiently to guess why he was being appealed to in this way.

Young Langton half turned to go, dejectedly enough; then he came back and said 'Please, sir, can't you help me? I shouldn't

mind the—the swishing so much if I'd done anything. But I haven't.'

'What can I do?' asked Mark.

'If you wouldn't mind speaking to Mr. Shelford for me—he'd listen to you, and he won't to me.'

'He will have gone by this time,' objected Mark.

'Not if you make haste,' said the boy, eagerly.

Mark was rather flattered by this confidence in his persuasive powers: he liked the idea, too, of posing as the protector of his class, and the good-natured element in him made him the readier to yield.

'Well, we'll have a shot at it, Langton,' he said. 'I doubt if it's much good, you know, but here goes—when you get in, hold your tongue and keep in the background—leave it to me.'

So they went out into the long passage with its whitewashed walls and rows of doors on each side, and black barrel-vaulting above; at the end the glimmer of light came through the iron bars of the doorway, which had a prison-like suggestion about them, and the reflectors of the unlighted gas lamps that projected here and there along the corridor gave back the glimmer as a tiny spark in the centre of each metal disc.

Mark stopped at the door of the Upper Fourth Class-room, which was Mr. Shelford's, and went in. It was a plain room, not unlike his own, but rather smaller; it had a dais with a somewhat larger desk for the master, and a different arrangement of the benches and lockers, but it was quite as gloomy, with an outlook into a grim area giving a glimpse of the pavement and railings above.

Mr. Shelford was evidently just going, for as they came in he had put a very large hat on the back of his head, and was winding a long grey comforter round his throat; but he took off the hat courteously as he saw Mark. He was a little old man, with a high brick-red colour on his smooth, scarcely wrinkled cheeks, a big aquiline nose, a wide thin-lipped mouth, and sharp little grey eyes, which he cocked sideways at one like an angry parrot.

Langton retired to a form out of hearing, and sat down on one end of it, nursing his detention paper anxiously.

'Well, Ashburn,' began the Reverend James Shelford, 'is there anything I can do for *you*?'

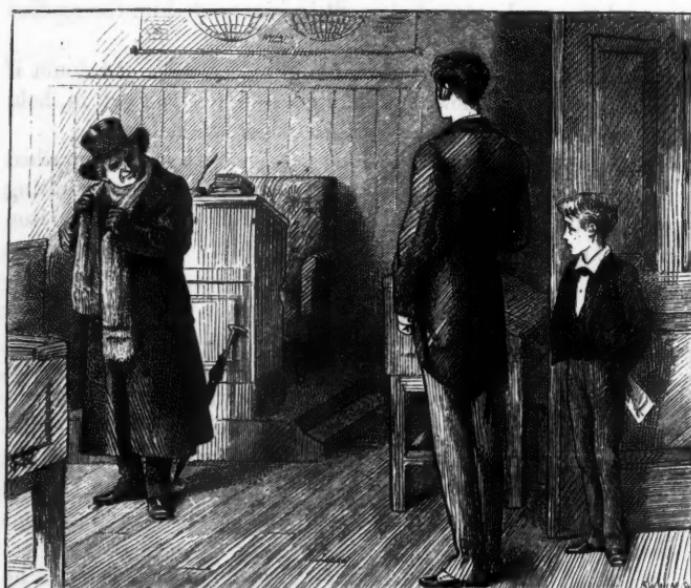
'Why,' said Mark, 'the fact is, I——'

'Eh, what?' said the elder. 'Wait a minute—there's that impudent fellow back again! I thought I'd seen the last of him. Here, you sir, didn't I send you up for a flogging?'

'I—I believe you did, sir,' said Langton, with extreme deference.

'Well, why ain't you *getting* that flogging—eh, sir? No impudence, now—just tell me, why ain't you being flogged? You ought to be in the middle of it now!'

'Well, you see,' said Mark, 'he's one of *my* boys——'



'I don't care whose boy he is,' said the other, testily; 'he's an impudent fellow, sir.'

'I don't think he is, really,' said Mark.

'D'y'e know what he did, then? Came whooping and shouting and hullabalooing into my room, for all the world as if it was his own nursery, sir. He's *always* doing it!'

'I never did it before,' protested Langton, 'and it wasn't my fault this time.'

'Wasn't your fault! You haven't got St. Vitus' dance, have you? I never heard there were any Tarantula spiders here. You don't go dancing into the Doctor's room, do you? *He'll* give

you a dancing lesson !' said the old gentleman, sitting down again to chuckle, and looking very like Mr. Punch.

'No, but allow me,' put in Mark; 'I assure you this boy is—'

'I know what you're going to tell me—he's a model boy, of course. It's singular what shoals of model boys *do* come dancing in here under some irresistible impulse after school. I'll put a stop to it now I've caught one. You don't know 'em as well as I do, sir, you don't know 'em—they're all impudent and all liars—some are cleverer at it than others, and that's all.'

'I'm afraid that's true enough,' said Mark, who did not like being considered inexperienced.

'Yes, it's cruel work having to do with boys, sir—cruel and thankless. If ever I try to help a boy in my class I think is trying to get on and please me, what does he do? Turn round and play me some scurvy trick, just to prove to the others he's not currying favour. And then they insult me—why, that very boy has been and shouted "Shellfish" through my keyhole many a time, I'll warrant !'

'I think you're mistaken,' said Mark, soothingly.

'You do ? I'll ask him. Here, d'ye mean to tell me you never called out "Shellfish" or—or other opprobrious epithets into my door, sir?' And he inclined his ear for the answer with his eyes fixed on the boy's face.

'Not "Shellfish,"' said the boy; 'I did "Prawn" once. But that was long ago.'

Mark gave him up then, with a little contempt for such injudicious candour.

'Oh !' said Mr. Shelford, catching him, but not ungently, by the ear. '"Prawn," eh ? "Prawn"; hear that, Ashburn ? Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me *why* "Prawn" ?'

To any one who looked at his bright-red face and prominent eyes, the reason was sufficiently obvious; but Langton probably felt that candour had its limits, and that this was a question that required judgment in dealing with it.

'Because—because I've heard other fellows call you that,' he replied.

'Ah, and why do *they* call me Prawn, eh ?'

'I never heard them give any reason,' said the boy, diplomatically.

Mr. Shelford let the boy go with another chuckle, and Langton retired to his form again out of earshot.

'Yes, Ashburn,' said old Jemmy, 'that's the name they have for me—one of 'em. "Prawn" and "Shellfish"—they yell it out after me as I'm going home, and then run away. And I've had to bear it thirty years.'

'Young ruffians!' said Mark, as if the sobriquets were wholly unknown to the Masters' room.

'Ah, they do though; and the other day, when my monitor opened the desk in the morning, there was a great impudent kitten staring me in the face. He'd put it in there himself, I dare say, to annoy me.'

He did not add that he had sent out for some milk for the intruder, and had nursed it on his old knees during morning school, after which he showed it out with every consideration for its feelings; but it was the case nevertheless, for his years amongst boys had still left a soft place in his heart, though he got little credit for it.

'Yes, it's a wearing life, sir, a wearing life,' he went on with less heat, 'hearing generations of stoopid boys all blundering at the same stiff places, and worrying over the same old passages. I'm getting very tired of it; I'm an old man now. "Occidit miseros crambe"—eh, you know how it goes on?'

'Yes, yes,' said Mark, 'quite so,'—though he had but a dim recollection of the line in question.

'Talking of verses,' said the other, 'I hear we're to have the pleasure of seeing one of your productions on Speech-night this year. Is that so?'

'I was not aware anything was settled,' said Mark, flushing with pleasure. 'I did lay a little thing of my own, a sort of allegorical Christmas piece—a *masque*, don't you know—before the Doctor and the Speeches Committee, but I haven't heard anything definite yet.'

'Oh, perhaps I'm premature,' said Mr. Shelford; 'perhaps I'm premature.'

'Do you mind telling me if you've heard anything said about it?' asked Mark, thoroughly interested.

'I did hear some talk about it in the luncheon hour. You weren't in the room, I believe, but I think they were to come to a decision this afternoon.'

'Then it will be all over by now,' said Mark; 'there may be a note on my desk about it. I—I think I'll go and see, if you'll excuse me.'

And he left the room hastily, quite forgetting his original purpose in entering: something much more important to him than whether a boy should be flogged or not, when he had no doubt richly deserved it, was pending just then, and he could not rest until he knew the result.

For Mark had always longed for renown of some sort, and for the last few years literary distinction had seemed the most open to him. He had sought it by more ambitious attempts, but even the laurels which the performance of a piece of his by boy-actors on a Speech-day might bring him had become desirable; and though he had written and submitted his work confidently and carelessly enough, he found himself not a little anxious and excited as the time for a decision drew near.

It was a small thing; but if it did nothing else it would procure him a modified fame in the school and the Masters' room, and Mark Ashburn had never felt resigned to be a nonentity anywhere.

Little wonder, then, that Langton's extremity faded out of his mind as he hurried back to his class-room, leaving that unlucky boy still in his captor's clutches.

The old clergyman put on the big hat again when Mark had gone, and stood up peering over the desk at his prisoner.

'Well, if you don't want to be locked up here all night, you'd better be off,' he remarked.

'To the Detention Room, sir?' faltered the boy.

'You know the way, I believe? If not, I can show you,' said the old gentleman, politely.

'But really and truly,' pleaded Langton, 'I didn't do anything this time. I was shoved in.'

'Who shoved you in? Come, you know well enough; you're going to lie, I can see. Who was he?'

It is not improbable that Langton *was* going to lie that time—his code allowed it—but he felt checked somehow. 'Well, I only know the fellow by name,' he said at last.

'Well, and *what's* his name? Out with it; I'll give him a detention card instead.'

'I can't tell you that,' said the boy in a lower voice.

'And why not, ye impudent fellow? You've just said you knew it. Why not?'

'Because it would be sneakish,' said Langton, boldly.

'Oh, "sneakish," would it? said old Jemmy. '"Sneakish,' eh? Well, well, I'm getting old, I forget these things. Per-

haps it would. I don't know what it is to insult an old man—that's fair enough, I dare say. And so you want me to let you off being whipped, eh ?

'Yes, when I've done nothing.'

'And if I let you off you'll come galloping in here as lively as ever to-morrow, calling out "Shellfish"—no, I forgot—"Prawn's" *your* favourite epithet, ain't it?—calling out "Prawn" under my very nose ?'

'No, I shan't,' said the boy.

'Well, I'll take your word for it, whatever that's worth,' and he tore up the compromising paper. 'Run off home to your tea, and don't bother me any more.'

Langton escaped, full of an awed joy at his wonderful escape, and old Mr. Shelford locked his desk, got out the big hook-nosed umbrella, which had contracted a strong resemblance to himself, and went too.

'That's a nice boy,' he muttered—"wouldn't tell tales, wouldn't he? But I dare say he was taking me in all the time. He'll be able to tell the other young scamps how neatly he got over "old Jemmy." I don't think he will, though. I can still tell when a boy's lying—I've had plenty of opportunities.'

Meanwhile Mark had gone back to his class-room. One of the porters ran after him with a note, and he opened it eagerly, only to be disappointed, for it was not from the committee. It was dated from Lincoln's Inn, and came from his friend Holroyd.

'Dear Ashburn,' the note ran, 'don't forget your promise to look in here on your way home. You know it's the last time we shall walk back together, and there's a favour I want to ask of you before saying good-bye. I shall be at chambers till five, as I am putting my things together.'

'I will go round presently,' he thought. 'I must say good-bye some time to-day, and it will be a bore to turn out after dinner.'

As he stood reading the note, young Langton passed him, bag in hand, with a bright and grateful face.

'Please, sir,' he said, saluting him, 'thanks awfully for getting Mr. Shelford to let me off: he wouldn't have done it but for you.'

'Oh, ah,' said Mark, suddenly remembering his errand of mercy, 'to be sure, yes. So he has let you off, has he? Well, I'm very glad I was of use to you, Langton. It was a hard fight, wasn't it? That's enough, get along home, and let me find you better up in your Nepos than you were yesterday.'

Beyond giving the boy his company in facing his judge for the second time, Mark, as will have been observed, had not been a very energetic advocate; but as Langton was evidently unaware of the fact, Mark himself was the last person to allude to it. Gratitude, whether earned or not, was gratitude, and always worth accepting.

'By Jove,' he thought to himself with half-ashamed amusement, 'I forgot all about the little beggar; left him to the tender mercies of old Prawn. All's well that ends well, anyhow!'

As he stood by the *grille* at the porter's lodge, the old Prawn himself passed slowly out, with his shoulders bent, and his old eyes staring straight before him with an absent, lack-lustre expression in them. Perhaps he was thinking that life might have been more cheerful for him if his wife Mary had lived, and he had had her and boys like that young Langton to meet him when his wearisome day was over, instead of being childless and a widower, and returning to the lonely, dingy house which he occupied as the incumbent of a musty church hard by.

Whatever he thought of, he was too engaged to notice Mark, who followed him with his eyes as he slowly worked his way up the flight of stone steps which led to the street level. 'Shall I ever come to that?' he thought. 'If I stay here all my life, I may. Ah, there's Gilbertson—he can tell me about this Speech-day business.'

Gilbertson was a fellow-master, and one of the committee for arranging the Speech-day entertainment. For the rest he was a nervously fussy little man, and met Mark with evident embarrassment.

'Well, Gilbertson,' said Mark, as unconcernedly as he could, 'settled your programme yet?'

'Er—oh yes, quite settled—quite, that is, not definitely as yet.'

'And—my little production?'

'Oh, ah, to be sure, yes, your little production. We all liked it very much—oh, exceedingly so—the Doctor especially—charmed with it, my dear Ashburn, charmed!'

'Very glad to hear it,' said Mark, with a sudden thrill; 'and—and have you decided to take it, then?'

'Well,' said Mr. Gilbertson, looking at the pavement all round him, 'you see, the fact is, the Doctor thought, and some of us thought so too, that a piece to be acted by boys should have a leetle more—eh? and not quite so much—so much of what yours

has, and a few of those little natural touches, you know—but you see what I mean, don't you ?'

'It would be a capital piece with all that in it,' said Mark, trying to preserve his temper, 'but I could easily alter it, you know, Gilbertson.'

'No, no,' said Gilbertson, eagerly, 'you mustn't think of it ; you'd spoil it ; we couldn't hear of it, and—and it won't be necessary to trouble you. Because, you see, the Doctor thought it was a little long, and not quite light enough ; and not exactly the sort of thing we want, but we all admired it.'

'But it won't do ? Is that what you mean ?'

'Why—er—nothing definite at present. We are going to write you a letter—a letter about it. Goodbye, goodbye ! Got a train to catch at Ludgate Hill.'

And he hustled away, glad to escape, for he had not counted upon having to announce a rejection in person.

Mark stood looking after him, with a slightly dazed feeling. *That* was over, then. He had written works which he felt persuaded had only to become known to bring him fame ; but for all that it seemed that he was not considered worthy to entertain a Speech-night audience at a London public school.

Mark had spent some years now in hunting the will-o'-the-wisp of literary fame, which so many pursue all their lives in vain, till it comes, at last, to flicker awhile above their graves. Even at Cambridge, where he had gone up from this very school of St. Peter's with a scholarship and anticipations of a brilliant career, he had put aside his tripos to join adventurous spirits in establishing more than one of those ephemeral undergraduate periodicals the satire of which has a boomerang-like power of recoil.

For a time, some easy triumphs in this direction, and his social qualities, made him a second Pendennis amongst the men of his college ; then his star, like that of Pendennis, had waned, and failure followed failure. His papers in his second-year examinations were so bad that his scholarship was not continued, and the next year he took a low third-class in his tripos, when a good first had been predicted for him. He had gone in for the Indian Civil Service, and in his last trial came out just three places below the lowest successful candidate. Now he had found himself forced to accept a third-form mastership in his old school, where it seemed that, if he was no longer a disciple, he was scarcely a prophet.

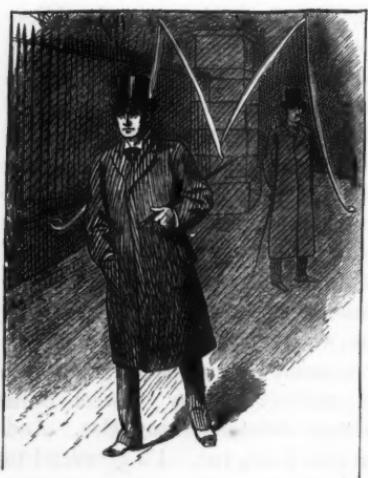
But these failures had only fanned his ambition. He would show the world there was something in him still ; and he began to send up articles to various London magazines, and to keep them going like a juggler's oranges, until his productions obtained a fair circulation, in manuscript.

Now and then a paper of his did gain the honours of publication, so that his disease did not die out, as happens with some. He went on, writing whatever came into his head, and putting his ideas out in every variety of literary mould—from a blank-verse tragedy to a sonnet, and a three-volume novel to a society paragraph—with equal ardour and facility, and very little success.

For he believed in himself implicitly. At present he was still before the outwork of prejudice which must be stormed by every conscript in the army of literature : that he would carry it eventually he did not doubt. But this disappointment about the committee hit him hard for a moment ; it seemed like a forecast of a greater disaster. Mark, however, was of a sanguine temperament, and it did not take him long to remount his own pedestal. ‘After all,’ he thought, ‘what does it matter ? If my “Sweet Bells Jangled” is only taken, I shan’t care about anything else. And there is some of my best work in that book, too. I’ll go round to Holroyd, and forget this business.’

CHAPTER II.

A LAST WALK.



ARK turned in from Chancery Lane under the old gateway, and went to one of the staircase doorways with the old curly eighteenth-century numerals cut on the centre stone of the arch and painted black. The days of these picturesque old dark-red buildings, with their small-paned dusty windows, their turrets and angles, and other little architectural surprises and inconveniences, are already numbered. Soon the sharp outline of their old gables and chimneys will cut the sky no longer ; but some

unpractical persons will be found who, although (or it may be *because*) they did not occupy them, will see them fall with a pang, and remember them with a kindly regret.

A gas jet was glimmering here and there behind the slits of dusty glass in the turret staircase as Mark came in, although it was scarcely dusk in the outer world ; for Old Square is generally a little in advance in this respect. He passed the doors laden with names and shining black plates announcing removals, till he came to an entrance on the second floor, where one of the names on a dingy ledge above the door was 'Mr. Vincent Holroyd.'

If Mark had been hitherto a failure, Vincent Holroyd could not be pronounced a success. He had been, certainly, more distinguished at college ; but after taking his degree, reading for the Bar, and being called, three years had passed in forced inactivity—not, perhaps, an altogether unprecedented circumstance in a young barrister's career, but with the unpleasant probability, in his case, of a continued brieflessness. A dry and reserved manner, due to a secret shyness, had kept away many whose friendship might have been useful to him ; and, though he was aware of

this, he could not overcome the feeling: he was a lonely man, and had become enamoured of his loneliness. Of the interest popularly believed to be indispensable to a barrister he could command none, and, with more than the average amount of ability, the opportunity for displaying it was denied him; so that when he was suddenly called upon to leave England for an indefinite time, he was able to abandon prospects that were not brilliant without any particular reluctance.

Mark found him tying up his few books and effects in the one chamber which he had sub-rented, a little panelled room looking out on Chancery Lane, and painted the pea-green colour which, with a sickly buff, seems set apart for professional decoration.

His face, which was dark and somewhat plain, with large, strong features, had a pleasant look on it as he turned to meet Mark. ‘I’m glad you could come,’ he said. ‘I thought we’d walk back together for the last time. I shall be ready in one minute. I’m only getting my law books together.’

‘You’re not going to take them out to Ceylon with you, then?’

‘Not now. Brandon—my landlord, you know—will let me keep them here till I send for them. I’ve just seen him. Shall we go now?’

They passed out through the dingy, gas-lit clerk’s room, and Holroyd stopped for a minute to speak to the clerk, a mild, pale man, who was neatly copying out an opinion at the foot of a case. ‘Goodbye, Tucker,’ he said. ‘I don’t suppose I shall see you again for some time.’

‘Goodbye, Mr. ’Olroyd, sir. Very sorry to lose you. I hope you’ll have a pleasant voy’ge, and get on over there, sir, better than you’ve done ’ere, sir.’

The clerk spoke with a queer mixture of patronage and deference: the deference was his ordinary manner with his employer in chief, a successful Chancery junior, and the patronage was caused by a pitying contempt he felt for a young man who had not got on.

‘That ’Olroyd ’ll never do anything at the Bar,’ he used to say when comparing notes with his friend the clerk to the opposite set of chambers. ‘He’s got no push, and he’s got no manner, and there ain’t nobody at his back. What he ever come to the Bar for at all, *I don’t know!*’

There were some directions to be given as to letters and papers, which the mild clerk received with as much gravity as though

he were not inwardly thinking, ‘I’d eat all the papers as ever come in for *you*, and want dinner after ‘em.’ And then Holroyd left his chambers for the last time, and he and Mark went down the ricketty winding stairs, and out under the colonnade of the Vice-Chancellors’ courts, at the closed doors of which a few clerks and reporters were copying down the cause list for the next day.

They struck across Lincoln’s Inn Fields and Long Acre, towards Piccadilly and Hyde Park. It was by no means a typical November afternoon: the sky was a delicate blue and the air mild, with just enough of autumn keenness in it to remind one, not unpleasantly, of the real time of year.

‘Well,’ said Holroyd, rather sadly, ‘you and I won’t walk together like this again for a long time.’

‘I suppose not,’ said Mark, with a regret that sounded a little formal, for their approaching separation did not, as a matter of fact, make him particularly unhappy.

Holroyd had always cared for him much more than he had cared for Holroyd, for whom Mark’s friendship had been a matter of circumstance rather than deliberate preference. They had been quartered in the same lodgings at Cambridge, and had afterwards ‘kept’ on the same staircase in college, which had led to a more or less daily companionship, a sort of intimacy that is not always strong enough to bear transplantation to town.

Holroyd had taken care that it should survive their college days; for he had an odd liking for Mark, in spite of a tolerably clear insight into his character. Mark had a way of inspiring friendships without much effort on his part, and this undemonstrative, self-contained man felt an affection for him which was stronger than he ever allowed himself to show.

Mark, for his part, had begun to feel an increasing constraint in the company of a friend who had an unpleasantly keen eye for his weak points, and with whom he was always conscious of a certain inferiority which, as he could discover no reason for it, galled his vanity the more.

Mark’s careless tone wounded Holroyd, who had hoped for some warmer response; and they walked on in silence until they turned into Hyde Park and crossed to Rotten Row, when Mark said, ‘By the way, Vincent, wasn’t there something you wanted to speak to me about?’

‘I wanted to ask a favour of you; it won’t give you much trouble,’ said Holroyd.

'Oh, in that case, if it's anything I *can* do, you know—but what is it?'

'Well,' said Holroyd, 'the fact is—I never told a soul till now—but I've written a book.'

'Never mind, old boy,' said Mark, with a light laugh; for the confession, or perhaps a certain embarrassment with which it was made, seemed to put Holroyd more on a level with himself. 'So have lots of fellows, and no one thinks any the worse of them—unless they print it. Is it a law book?'

'Not exactly,' said Holroyd; 'it's a romance.'

'A romance!' cried Mark. 'You!'

'Yes,' said Holroyd, 'I. I've always been something of a dreamer, and I amused myself by putting one of my dreams down on paper. I wasn't disturbed.'

'You've been called though, haven't you?'

'I never got up,' said Holroyd, with a rather melancholy grimace. 'I began well enough. I used to come up to chambers by ten and leave at half past six, after noting up reports and textbooks all day; but no solicitor seemed struck by my industry. Then I sat in court and took down judgments most elaborately; but no leader ever asked *me* to take notes for him, and I never got a chance of suggesting anything to the court as *amicus curiae*, for both the Vice-Chancellors seemed able to get along pretty well without me. Then I got tired of that, and somehow this book got into my head, and I couldn't rest till I'd got it out again. It's finished now, and I'm lonely again.'

'And you want me to run my eye over it and lick it into shape a little?' asked Mark.

'Not quite that,' said Holroyd; 'it must stand as it is. What I'm going to ask you is this: I don't know any fellow I would care to ask but yourself. I want it published. I shall be out of England, probably with plenty of other matters to occupy me for some time. I want you to look after the manuscript for me while I'm away. Do you mind taking the trouble?'

'Not a bit, old fellow,' said Mark, 'no trouble in the world; only tying up the parcel each time, and sending it off again. Well, I didn't mean that; but it's no trouble, really.'

'I dare say you won't be called upon to see it through the press,' said Holroyd; 'but if such a thing as an acceptance should happen, I should like you to make all the arrangements. You've

had some experience in these things, and I haven't, and I shall be away too.'

'I'll do the best I can,' said Mark. 'What sort of a book is it?'

'It's a romance, as I said,' said Holroyd. 'I don't know that I can describe it more exactly: it—'

'Oh, it doesn't matter,' interrupted Mark. 'I can read it some time. What have you called it?'

'"Glamour,"' said Holroyd, still with a sensitive shrinking at having to reveal what had long been a cherished secret.

'It isn't a society novel, I suppose?'

'No,' said Holroyd. 'I'm not much of a society man; I go out very little.'

'But you ought to, you know: you'll find people very glad to see you if you only cultivate them.'

There was something, however, in Mark's manner of saying this that suggested a consciousness that this might be a purely personal experience.

'Shall I?' said Holroyd. 'I don't know. People are kind enough, but they can only be really glad to see any one who is able to amuse them or interest them, and that's natural enough. I can't flatter myself that I'm particularly interesting or amusing; any way it's too late to think about that now.'

'You won't be able to do the hermit much over in Ceylon, will you?'

'I don't know. My father's plantation is in rather a remote part of the island. I don't think he has ever been very intimate with the other planters near him, and as I left the place when I was a child I have fewer friends there than here even. But there will be plenty to do if I am to learn the business as he seems to wish.'

'Did he never think of having you over before?'

'He wanted me to come over and practise at the Colombo Bar, but that was soon after I was called, and I preferred to try my fortune in England first. I was the second son, you see, and while my brother John was alive I was left pretty well to my own devices. I went, as you know, to Colombo in my second Long, but only for a few weeks, of course, and my father and I didn't get on together somehow. But he's ill now, and poor John died of dysentery, and he's alone, so even if I had had any practice to leave I could hardly refuse to go out to him. As it is, as far as that is concerned, I have nothing to keep me.'

They were walking down Rotten Row as Holroyd said this, with the dull leaden surface of the Serpentine on their right, and away to the left, across the tan and the grey sward, the Cavalry Barracks, with their long narrow rows of gleaming windows. Up the long convex surface of the Row a faint white mist was crawling, and a solitary, spectral-looking horseman was cantering noiselessly out of it towards them. The evening had almost begun; the sky had changed to a delicate green tint, merged towards the west in a dusky crocus, against which the Memorial spire stood out sharp and black; from South Kensington came the sound of a church bell calling for some evening service.

'Doesn't that bell remind you somehow of Cambridge days?' said Mark. 'I could almost fancy we were walking up again from the boats, and that was the chapel bell ringing.'

'I wish we were,' said Holroyd with a sigh: 'they were good old times, and they will never come back.'

'You're very low, old fellow,' said Mark, 'for a man going back to his native country.'

'Ah, but I don't feel as if it was my native country, you see. I've lived here so long. And no one knows me out there except my poor old father, and we're almost strangers. I'm leaving the few people I care for behind me.'

'Oh, it will be all right,' said Mark, with the comfortable view one takes of another's future: 'you'll get on well enough. We shall have you a rich coffee planter, or a Deputy Judge Advocate, in no time. *Any* fellow has a chance out there. And you'll soon make friends in a place like that.'

'I like my friends ready-made, I think,' said Holroyd; 'but one must make the best of it, I suppose.'

They had come to the end of the Row; the gates of Kensington Gardens were locked, and behind the bars a policeman was watching them suspiciously, as if he suspected they might attempt a forcible entry.

'Well,' said Mark, stopping, 'I suppose you turn off here?' Holroyd would have been willing to go on with him as far as Kensington had Mark proposed it, but he gave no sign of desiring this, so his friend's pride kept him silent too.

'One word more about the—the book,' he said. 'I may put your name and address on the title-page, then? It goes off to Chilton and Fladgate to-night.'

'Oh yes, of course,' said Mark, 'put whatever you like.'

'I've not given them my real name, and, if anything comes of it, I should like that kept a secret.'

'Just as you please; but why?'

'If I keep on at the Bar, a novel, whether it's a success or not, is not the best bait for briefs,' said Holroyd; 'and besides, if I am to get a slating, I'd rather have it under an *alias*, don't you see? So the only name on the title-page is "Vincent Beauchamp."'

'Very well,' said Mark, 'none shall know till you choose to tell them, and, if anything has to be done about the book, I'll see to it with pleasure, and write to you when it's settled. So you can make your mind easy about *that*.'

'Thanks,' said Holroyd; 'and now, goodbye, Mark.'

There was real feeling in his voice, and Mark himself caught something of it as he took the hand Vincent held out.

'Goodbye, old boy,' he said. 'Take care of yourself—pleasant voyage and good luck. You're no letter-writer, I know, but you'll drop me a line now and then, I hope. What's the name of the ship you go out in?'

'The "Mangalore." She leaves the Docks to-morrow. Good-bye for the present, Mark. We shall see one another again, I hope. Don't forget all about me before that.'

'No, no,' said Mark; 'we've been friends too long for that.'

One more goodbye, a momentary English awkwardness in getting away from one another, and they parted, Holroyd walking towards Bayswater across the bridge, and Mark making for Queen's Gate and Kensington.

Mark looked after his friend's tall strong figure for a moment before it disappeared in the dark. 'Well, I've seen the last of him,' he thought. 'Poor old Holroyd! to think of his having written a book—he's one of those unlucky beggars who never make a hit at anything. I expect I shall have some trouble about it by-and-by.'

Holroyd walked on with a heavier heart. 'He won't miss me,' he told himself. 'Will Mabel say goodbye like that?'

CHAPTER III.

GOODBYE.



N the same afternoon in which we have seen Mark and Vincent walk home together for the last time, Mrs. Langton and her eldest daughter Mabel were sitting in the pretty drawing-room of their house in Kensington Park Gardens.

Mrs. Langton was the wife of a successful Q.C. at the Chancery Bar, and one of those elegantly languid women with a manner charming enough to conceal a slight shallowness of mind and character; she was pretty still, and an invalid at all times

when indisposition was not positively inconvenient.

It was one of her 'at home' days, but fewer people than usual had made their appearance, and these had filtered away early, leaving traces of their presence behind them in the confidential grouping of seats and the tea-cups left high and dry in various parts of the room.

Mrs. Langton was leaning luxuriously back in a low soft chair, lazily watching the firebeams glisten through the stained-glass screen, and Mabel was on a couch near the window trying to read a magazine by the fading light.

'Hadn't you better ring for the lamps, Mabel?' suggested her mother. 'You can't possibly see to read by this light, and it's so trying for the eyes. I suppose no one else will call now, but it's very strange that Vincent should not have come to say goodbye.'

'Vincent doesn't care about "at homes,"' said Mabel.

'Still, not to say goodbye—after knowing us so long, too! and I'm sure we've tried to show him every kindness. Your father was

always having solicitors to meet him at dinner, and it was never any use ; and he sails to-morrow. I think he *might* have found time to come !'

' So do I,' agreed Mabel. ' It's not like Vincent, though he was always shy and odd in some things. He hasn't been to see us nearly so much lately, but I can't believe he will really go away without a word.'

Mrs. Langton yawned delicately. ' It would not surprise me, I must say,' she said. ' When a young man sets himself——but whatever she was going to say was broken off by the entrance of her youngest daughter Dolly, with the German governess, followed by the man bearing rose-shaded lamps.

Dolly was a vivacious child of about nine, with golden locks which had a pretty ripple in them, and deep long-lashed eyes that promised to be dangerous one day. ' We took Frisk out without the leash, mummy,' she cried, ' and when we got into Westbourne Grove he ran away. Wasn't it too bad of him ? '

' Never mind, darling, he'll come back quite safe—he always does.'

' Ah, but it's his running away that I mind,' said Dolly ; ' and you know what a dreadful state he always *will* come back in. He must be cured of doing it somehow.'

' Talk to him very seriously about it, Dolly,' said Mabel.

' I've tried that—and he only cringes and goes and does it again directly he's washed. I know what I'll do, Mabel. When he comes back this time, he shall have a jolly good whacking ! '

' My dear child,' cried Mrs. Langton, ' what a dreadful expression ! '

' Colin says it,' said Dolly, though she was quite aware that Colin was hardly a purist in his expressions.

' Colin says a good many things that are not pretty in a little girl's mouth.'

' So he does,' said Dolly, cheerfully. ' I wonder if he knows? I'll go and tell him of it—he's come home.' And she ran off just as the door-bell rang.

' Mabel, I really think that must be some one else coming to call after all. Do you know, I feel so tired and it's so late that I think I will leave you and Fräulein to talk to them. Papa and I are going out to dinner to-night, and I must rest a little before I begin to dress. I'll run away while I can.'

Mrs. Langton fluttered gracefully out of the room as the butler crossed the hall to open the door, evidently to a visitor, and presently Mabel heard 'Mr. Holroyd' announced.

'So you really have come after all,' said Mabel, holding out her hand with a pretty smile of welcome. 'Mamma and I thought you meant to go away without a word.'

'You might have known me better than that,' said Holroyd.

'But when your last afternoon in England was nearly over and no sign of you, there *was* some excuse for thinking so; but you have come at last, so we won't scold you. Will you have some tea? It isn't very warm, I'm afraid, but you're so very late, you know. Ring, and you shall have some fit to drink.'

Vincent accepted tea, chiefly because he wanted to be waited upon once more by her with the playful, gracious manner, just tinged with affectionate mockery, which he knew so well; and then he talked to her and Fräulein Mozer, with a heavy sense of the unsatisfactory nature of this triangular conversation for a parting interview.

The governess felt this too. She had had a shrewd suspicion for some time of the state of Holroyd's feelings towards Mabel, and felt a sentimental pity for him, condemned as he was to disguise them under ordinary afternoon conversation.

'He is going away,' she thought; 'but he shall have his chance, the poor young man. You will not think it very rude, Mr. Holroyd,' she said, rising: 'it will not disturb you if I practise? There is a piece which I am to play at a school concert to-morrow, and I do not yet know it.'

'Vincent won't mind, Ottilia dear,' said Mabel. 'Will you, Vincent?' So the governess went to the further room where the piano stood, and was soon performing a conveniently noisy German march. Vincent sat still for some moments watching Mabel. He wished to keep in his memory the impression of her face as he saw it then, lighted up by the soft glow of the heavily shaded lamp at her elbow, a spirited and yet tender face, with dark-grey eyes, a sensitive, beautiful mouth, and brown hair with threads of gold in it which gleamed in the lamplight as she turned her graceful head.

He knew it would fade only too soon, as often happens with the face we best love and have reason chiefly to remember. Others will rise unbidden with the vividness of a photograph, but the

one face eludes us more and more, till no effort of the mind will call it up with any distinctness.

Mabel was the first to speak. ‘Are you *very* fond of music, Vincent?’ she said, a little maliciously. ‘Would you rather be allowed to listen in peace, or talk? You *may* talk, you know.’

‘I came late on purpose to see as much of you as possible,’ said poor Vincent. ‘This is the last time I shall be able to talk to you for so long.’

‘I know,’ said Mabel, simply; ‘I’m very sorry, Vincent.’ But there was only a frank friendliness in her eyes as she spoke, nothing more, and Vincent knew it.

‘So am I,’ he said. ‘Do you know, Mabel, I have no photograph of you. Will you give me one to take away with me?’

‘Of course, if I have one,’ she said, as she went to a table for an album. ‘Oh, Vincent, I’m so sorry. I’m afraid there’s not one left. But I can give you one of mamma and papa and Dolly, and I think Colin too.’

‘I should like all those very much,’ said Vincent, who could not accept this offer as a perfect substitute, ‘but can’t you find one of yourself, not even an old one?’

‘I think I can give you one, after all,’ said Mabel; ‘wait a minute.’ And as she came back after a minute’s absence she said, ‘Here’s one I had promised to Gilda Featherstone, but Gilda can wait and you can’t. I’ll give you an envelope to put them all in, and then we will talk. Tell me first how long you are going to be away.’

‘No longer than I can help,’ said Vincent, ‘but it depends on so many things.’

‘But you will write to us, won’t you?’

‘Will you answer if I do?’

‘Of course,’ said Mabel. ‘Don’t you remember when I was a little girl, and used to write to you at school, and at Trinity too? I was always a better correspondent than you were, Vincent.’

Just then Dolly came, holding a cage of lovebirds. ‘Champion said you were here,’ she began. ‘Vincent, wait till I put Jachin and Boaz down. Now you can kiss me. I knew you wouldn’t go away without saying goodbye to me. You haven’t seen my birds, have you? Papa gave them to me. They’re such chilly birds, I’ve brought them in here to get warm.’

'They're very much alike,' said Vincent, looking into the cage, upon which each bird instantly tried to hide its head in the sand underneath the other.

'They're exactly the same,' said Dolly, 'so I never know which is Jachin and which is Boaz; but they don't know their own names, and if they did they wouldn't answer to them, so it doesn't matter so very much after all, *does it?*'

As it never occurred to Dolly that anybody could have the bad taste to prefer any one else's conversation to her own, she took entire possession of Vincent, throwing herself into the couch nearest to him, and pouring out her views on lovebirds generally to his absent ear.

'They don't know me yet,' she concluded, 'but then I've only had them six months. Do you know, Harold Caffyn says they're little humbugs, and kiss one another only when people look at them. I *have* caught them fighting dreadfully myself. I don't think lovebirds ought to fight. Do you? Oh, and Harold says that when one dies I ought to time the other and see how long it takes him to pine away; but Harold is always saying horrid things like that.'

'Dolly dear,' cried the governess from the inner room, 'will you run and ask Colin if he has taken away the metronome to the schoolroom?'

Dolly danced out to hunt for that prosaic instrument in a desultory way, and then forgot it in some dispute with Colin, who generally welcomed any distraction whilst preparing his school-work—a result which Fräulein Mozer probably took into account, particularly as she had the metronome by her side at the time. 'Poor Mr. Vincent!' she thought; 'he has not come to talk with Dolly of lovebirds.'

'You will be sure to write and tell us all about yourself,' said Mabel. 'What do you mean to do out there, Vincent?'

'Turn coffee-planter, perhaps,' he said gloomily.

'Oh, Vincent!' she said reproachfully, 'you used to be so ambitious. Don't you remember how we settled once that you were going to be famous? You can't be very famous by coffee-planting, can you?'

'If I do that, it is only because I see nothing else to do. But I am ambitious still, Mabel. I shall not be content with that, if a certain venture of mine is successful enough to give me hopes of anything better. But it's a very big "if" at present.'

'What is the venture?' said Mabel. 'Tell me, Vincent; you used to tell me everything once.'

Vincent had very few traces of his tropical extraction in his nature, and his caution and reserve would have made him disposed to wait at least until his book were safe in the haven of printer's ink before confessing that he was an author.

But Mabel's appeal scattered all his prudence. He had written with Mabel as his public; with the chief hope in his mind that some day she would see his work and say that it was well done. He felt a strong impulse to confide in her now, and have the comfort of her sympathy and encouragement to carry away with him.

If he had been able to tell her then of his book, and his plans respecting it, Mabel might have looked upon him with a new interest, and much that followed in her life might have been prevented. But he hesitated for a moment, and while he hesitated a second interruption took place. The opportunity was gone, and, like most opportunities in conversation, once missed was gone for ever. The irrepressible Dolly was the innocent instrument: she came in with a big portfolio of black and white papers, which she put down on a chair. 'I can't find the metronome anywhere, Fräulein,' she said. 'I've been talking to Colin; he wants you to come and say goodbye before you go, Vincent. Colin says he nearly got "swished" to-day, only his master begged him off because he'd done nothing at all really. Wasn't it nice of him? Ask him to tell you about it. Oh, and, Vincent, I want your head for my album. May I cut it out?'

'I want it myself, Dolly, please,' said Vincent; 'I don't think I can do without it just yet.'

'I don't mean your real head,' said Dolly, 'I believe you know that—it's only the outline I want!'

'It isn't a very dreadful operation, Vincent,' said Mabel. 'Dolly has been victimising all her friends lately, but she doesn't hurt them.'

'Very well, Dolly, I consent,' said Vincent; 'only be gentle with me.'

'Sit down here on this chair against the wall,' said Dolly, imperiously. 'Mabel, please take the shade off the lamp and put it over here.' She armed herself with a pencil and a large sheet of white paper as she spoke. 'Now, Vincent, put yourself so that your shadow comes just here, and keep perfectly

still. Don't move or talk or anything, or your profile will be spoilt!'

'I feel very nervous, Dolly,' said Vincent, sitting down obediently.

'What a coward you must be! Why, one of the boys at Colin's school said he rather liked it. Will you hold his head



steady, Mabel, please?—no, you hold the paper up while I trace.'

Vincent sat still while Mabel leaned over the back of his chair, with one hand lightly touching his shoulder, while her soft hair swept across his cheek now and then. Long after—as long as he lived, in fact—he remembered those moments with a thrill.

'Now I have done, Vincent,' cried Dolly, triumphantly, after

some laborious tracing on the paper. ‘ You haven’t got *much* of a profile, but it will be exactly like you when I’ve cut it out. There !’ she said, as she held up a life-size head cut out in curling black paper ; ‘ don’t you think it’s like you, yourself ? ’

‘ I don’t know,’ said Vincent, inspecting it rather dubiously, ‘ but I must say I hope it isn’t.’

‘ I’ll give you a copy to take away with you,’ said Dolly, generously, as she cut out another black head with her deft little hands. ‘ There, that’s for you, Vincent—you won’t give it away, *will* you ? ’

‘ Shall I promise to wear it always next to my heart, Dolly ? ’

Dolly considered this question. ‘ I think you’d better not,’ she said at last : ‘ it would keep you warm certainly, but I’m afraid the black comes off—you must have it mounted on cardboard and framed, you know.’

At this point Mrs. Langton came rustling down, and Vincent rose to meet her, with a desperate hope that he would be asked to spend the whole of his last evening with them—a hope that was doomed to disappointment.

‘ My dear Vincent,’ she said, holding out both her hands, ‘ so you’ve come after all. Really, I was quite afraid you’d forgotten us. Why didn’t somebody tell me Vincent was here, Mabel ? I would have hurried over my dressing to come down. It’s so very provoking, Vincent, but I have to say goodbye in a hurry. My husband and I are going out to dinner, and he wouldn’t come home to change, so he will dress at his chambers, and I have to go up and fetch him. And it’s so late, and they dine so ridiculously early where we’re going, and he’s sure to keep me waiting such a time, I mustn’t lose another minute. Will you see me to the carriage, Vincent ? Thanks. Has Marshall put the footwarmer in, and is the drugget down ? Then we’ll go, please ; and I wish you every success in—over there, you know, and you must be careful of yourself, and bring home a nice wife.—Lincoln’s Inn, tell him, please.—Goodbye, Vincent, goodbye ! ’

And she smiled affectionately and waved her long-gloved hand behind the window as the carriage rolled off, and all the time he knew that it would not distress her if she never saw him again.

He went slowly back to the warm drawing-room, with its delicate perfume of violets. He had no excuse for lingering there any

longer—he must say his last words to Mabel and go. But before he could make up his mind to this another visitor was announced, who must have come up almost as Mrs. Langton had driven off.

'Mr. Caffyn,' said Champion, imposingly, who had a graceful way of handing dishes and a dignified deference in his bow which in his own opinion excused certain attacks of solemn speechlessness and eccentricity of gait that occasionally overcame him.

A tall, graceful young man came in, with an air of calm and ease that was in the slightest degree exaggerated. He had short light hair, well-shaped eyes, which were keen and rather cold, and a firm, thin-lipped mouth; his voice, which he had under perfect control, was clear and pleasant.

'Do you mean this for an afternoon call, Harold?' asked Mabel, who did not seem altogether pleased at his arrival.

'Yes, we're not at home now, are we, Mabel?' put in audacious Dolly.

'I was kept rather late at rehearsals, and I had to dine afterwards,' explained Caffyn; 'but I shouldn't have come in if I had not had a commission to perform. When I have done it you can send me away.'

Harold Caffyn was a relation of Mrs. Langton's. His father was high up in the consular service abroad, and he himself had lately gone on the stage, finding it more attractive than the Foreign Office, for which he had been originally intended. He had had no reason as yet to regret his apostasy, for he had obtained almost at once an engagement in a leading West-end theatre, while his social prospects had not been materially affected by the changes; partly because the world has become more liberal of late in these matters, and partly because he had contrived to gain a tolerably secure position in it already, by the help of a pleasant manner and the musical and dramatic accomplishments which had led him to adopt the stage as his profession.

Like Holroyd, he had known Mabel from a child, and as she grew up had felt her attraction too much for his peace of mind. His one misgiving in going on the stage had been lest it should lessen his chance of finding favour with her.

This fear proved groundless: Mabel had not altered to him in the least. But his successes as an amateur had not followed him to the public stage; he had not as yet been entrusted with

any but very minor *rôles*, and was already disenchanted enough with his profession to be willing to give it up on very moderate provocation.

'Why, Holroyd, I didn't see you over there. How are you?' he said cordially, though his secret feelings were anything but cordial, for he had long seen reason to consider Vincent as a possible rival.

'Vincent has come to say goodbye,' explained Dolly. 'He's going to India to-morrow.'

'Goodbye!' cried Caffyn, his face clearing: 'that's rather sudden, isn't it, Holroyd? Well, I'm very glad I am able to say goodbye too' (as there is no doubt Caffyn was). 'You never told me you were off so soon.'

Holroyd had known Caffyn for several years: they had frequently met in that house, and, though there was little in common between them, their relations had always been friendly.

'It was rather sudden,' Holroyd said, 'and we haven't met lately.'

'And you're off to-morrow, eh? I'm sorry. We might have managed a parting dinner before you went—it must be kept till you come back.'

'What was the commission, Harold?' asked Mabel.

'Oh, ah! I met my uncle to-day, and he told me to find out if you would be able to run down to Chigbourne one Saturday till Monday soon. I suppose you won't. He's a dear old boy, but he's rather a dull old pump to stay two whole days with.'

'You forget he's Dolly's godfather,' said Mabel.

'And he's my uncle,' said Caffyn; 'but he's not a bit the livelier for that, you know. You're asked too, Juggins.' (Juggins was a name he had for Dolly, whom he found pleasure in teasing, and who was not deeply attached to him.)

'Would you like to go, Dolly, if mamma says yes?' asked Mabel.

'Is Harold going?' said Dolly.

'Harold does not happen to be asked, my Juggins,' said that gentleman, blandly.

'Then we'll go, Mabel, and I shall take Frisk, because Uncle Antony hasn't seen him for a long time.'

Holroyd saw no use in staying longer. He went into the school-room to see Colin, who was as sorry to say goodbye as the pile of

school-books in front of him allowed, and then he returned to take leave of the others. The governess read in his face that her well-meant services had been of no avail, and sighed compassionately as she shook hands. Dolly nestled against him and cried a little, and the cool Harold felt so strongly that he could afford to be generous now, that he was genial and almost affectionate in his good wishes.

His face clouded, however, when Mabel said, ‘Don’t ring, Ottilia. I will go to the door with Vincent—it’s the last time.’ ‘I wonder if she cares about the fellow?’ he thought uneasily.

‘You won’t forget to write to us as soon as you can, Vincent?’ said Mabel, as they stood in the hall together. ‘We shall be thinking of you so often, and wondering what you are doing, and how you are.’

The hall of a London house is perhaps hardly the place for love-passages—there is something fatally ludicrous about a declaration amongst the hats and umbrellas. In spite of a consciousness of this, however, Vincent felt a passionate impulse even then, at that eleventh hour, to tell Mabel something of what was in his heart.

But he kept silence: a surer instinct warned him that he had delayed too long to have any chance of success then. It was the fact that Mabel had no suspicion of the real nature of his feelings, and he was right in concluding as he did that to avow it then would come upon her as a shock for which she was unprepared.

Fräulein Mozer’s inclination to a sentimental view of life, and Caffyn’s tendency to see a rival in every one, had quickened their insight respectively; but Mabel herself, though girls are seldom the last to discover such symptoms, had never thought of Vincent as a possible lover, for which his own undemonstrative manner and procrastination were chiefly to blame.

He had shrunk from betraying his feelings before. ‘She can never care for me,’ he had thought; ‘I have done nothing to deserve her—I am nobody,’ and this had urged him on to do something which might qualify him in his own eyes, until which he had steadily kept his own counsel and seen her as seldom as possible.

Then he had written his book; and though he was not such a fool as to imagine that any woman’s heart could be approached

through print alone, he could not help feeling on revising his work that he had done that which, if successful, would remove something of his own unworthiness, and might give him a new recommendation to a girl of Mabel's literary tastes.

But then his father's summons to Ceylon had come—he was compelled to obey, and now he had to tear himself away with his secret still untold and trust to time and absence (who are remarkably overrated as advocates by the way) to plead for him.

He felt the full bitterness of this as he held both her hands and looked down on her fair face with the sweet eyes that shone with a sister's—but only a sister's—affection. ‘She would have loved me in time,’ he thought; ‘but the time may never come now.’

He did not trust himself to say much: he might have asked and obtained a kiss, as an almost brother who was going far away, but to him that would have been the hollowest mockery.

Suppressed emotion made him abrupt and almost cold, he let her hands drop suddenly, and with nothing more than a broken ‘God bless you, Mabel, goodbye, dear, goodbye!’ he left the house hurriedly, and the moment after he was alone on the hill with his heartache.

‘So he’s gone!’ remarked Caffyn, as she re-entered the drawing-room, after lingering a few moments in the empty hall. ‘What a dear, dull old plodder it is, isn’t it? He’ll do much better at planting coffee than he ever did at law—at least, it’s to be hoped so!’

‘You are very fond of calling other people dull, Harold,’ said Mabel, with a displeased contraction of her eyebrows. ‘Vincent is not in the least dull: you only speak of him like that because you don’t understand him.’

‘I didn’t say it disparagingly,’ said Caffyn. ‘I rather admire dulness; it’s so restful. But as you say, Mabel, I dare say I don’t understand him: he really doesn’t give a fellow a fair chance. As far as I know him, I *do* like him uncommonly; but, at the same time, I must confess he has always given me the impression of being, don’t you know, just a trifle heavy. But very likely I’m wrong.’

‘Very likely indeed,’ said Mabel, closing the subject. But Caffyn had not spoken undesignedly, and had risked offending her for the moment for the sake of producing the effect he

wanted ; and he was not altogether unsuccessful. ‘Was Harold right ?’ she thought later. ‘Vincent is very quiet, but I always thought there was power of some sort behind ; and yet—would it not have shown itself before now ? But if poor Vincent is only dull, it will make no difference to me ; I shall like him just as much.’

But, for all that, the suggestion very effectually prevented all danger of Vincent’s becoming idealised by distance into something



more interesting than a brother—which was, indeed, the reason why Caffyn made it.

Vincent himself, meanwhile, unaware—as all of us would pray to be kept unaware—of the portrait of himself, by a friend, which was being exhibited to the girl he loved, was walking down Ladbroke Hill to spend the remainder of his last evening in England in loneliness at his rooms ; for he had no heart for anything else.

It was dark by that time. Above him was a clear, steel-blue sky ; in front, across the hollow, rose Campden Hill, a dim, dark mass, twinkling with lights. By the square at his side a German band was playing the garden music from ‘Faust,’ with no more regard for expression and tunefulness than a German band is ever

capable of; but distance softened the harshness and imperfection of their rendering, and Siebel's air seemed to Vincent the expression of his own passionate, unrequited devotion.

'I would do anything for her,' he said, half aloud, 'and yet I dared not tell her then. . . . But if I ever come back to her again —before it is too late—she shall know all she is and always will be to me. I will wait and hope for that.'

(To be continued.)



THE LAY FIGURE.



shops and second-hand furniture dealers.

There were many articles I should have been glad to possess, such as carved cabinets and other furniture of the fifteenth century which had found their way to these curiosity-mongers from many old houses and châteaux ransacked by the Prussians; but, even could I have given the prices demanded for them, I should have found their weight incommodious and expensive for transit to England. All at once my glance chanced to fall on a lay figure exposed for sale—a very beautiful lay figure too, a female. It arrested me on the spot. The master and mistress of the shop immediately advanced, inviting me to enter and inspect it, assuring me it was in perfect condition, and if I would take it

PON one of my trips to Paris—and I am rather partial to running over there occasionally, as refreshing to both my eye and hand (for I am an artist, a painter of 'genre' pictures, my subjects generally in fashionable life)—upon one of these excursions I chanced to be in the neighbourhood of Mont St. Geneviève, in a long narrow lane going down-hill and occupied on both sides of the way by *bric-à-brac*

I should have it a bargain. ‘Cent vingt francs!’ Five pounds! It was wonderful, a bargain indeed, if unbroken. Why, I had paid five-and-twenty pounds for mine at home, in every respect inferior to this. So I entered the shop and made a minute examination. The lay figure was tied up to the side wall with a strong cord, and it took some little time to unfasten it. The formation was perfect, quite a work of art, for it was a model of a beautiful woman of exquisite proportions cased in a fine elastic silk skin. All the joints worked well in their sockets, as easily as if recently oiled. The head turned gracefully on its slight neck, and its long soft black hair was worked into the scalp as only French hands could work it. The face was oval, of a fine enamelled surface, painted a pale creamy tint; the eyes were brown and different from any I had ever seen in lay figures, of glass like a doll’s.

Here was a chance, a bargain indeed! I pulled out my purse to examine its contents. Alas! I found it seven francs deficient. I counted it again, and felt in my pockets, the dealer watching me. ‘N’importe,’ said the man, smiling with great *bonhomie*. ‘Monsieur is artiste-peintre; cela suffit; I have a great respect for his profession: he shall have it for his money.’ Wonderful! A Frenchman to be so liberal! Generally I found them rather difficult to treat with, but here was an exception. Now another obstacle presented itself. If I gave him the whole contents of my purse, how could I pay the fiacre in which I proposed to carry home my purchase? I demurred again. My generous dealer held up both his hands. ‘Pardon, was it not the duty of the seller to convey his goods to the purchaser? If monsieur would wait two seconds, the boy Henri should wheel it on a truck to monsieur’s hôtel.’ Here, then, we came to a settlement at last, and I emptied the contents of my purse into his hand, at which proceeding he smiled and made me a polite bow. The lay figure wore a loose grey linen wrapper; it was now carefully packed up in green baize and placed upon the truck wheeled by Henri, a lad of about fifteen. The dealer took off his cap and bowed to me as we parted; madame made me a French bend, with a sweet ‘Adieu, monsieur.’ Alas for the deceitfulness of Parisians! Happening to glance in a looking-glass at the door, I saw reflected therein the dealer winking his eye and madame laughing derisively. Could it possibly be at *me*? Was I cheated? No. I had minutely examined my purchase; I supposed they were only indulging in a little spleen at ‘perfidie Albion.’

I lodged in the Rue de la Paix, so that it was rather a long distance for Henri to wheel the truck, I walking on the footpath, he beside me on the *pavé*; and all went well until we reached the Rue de Rivoli, when, without any previous notice, off rolled the lay figure at the feet of two Sisters of St. Joseph who were just crossing the road. Of course this caused an obstruction: carriages had to draw up, *sergents de ville* pounced down upon us, and, amid rather strong language and some laughter, the figure was readjusted and securely tied this time. ‘Monsieur is taking home his bride!’ cried a soldier.

On arriving at the door of my hôtel the old concierge appeared horror-stricken: she fancied there had been an accident. She was not much reassured on seeing my purchase unrolled—it was so exactly like a woman. It was unpacked in the yard, as the boy had to take back the baize with him. I ran up to my room to find him a few sous, and for these he was so grateful that he came up to me whispering confidentially, ‘Monsieur, excusez—but—keep your studio door locked at night!’ and ran away. No fear of having it stolen in London, thought I, but in Paris no doubt it might happen.

I then proceeded to carry my purchase up three flights of stairs to my rooms, taking it in my arms as I should have done a living person. It was heavy, of course, but so beautiful in its mechanism that it bent easily into a sitting position. I had placed its arms over my shoulders: they felt almost as soft as a woman’s; in my imagination they really appeared to press me, as if about to meet around my neck—an absurd fancy, of course. I put it down on the landing-place while I took the key from the lock on opening the door. Now, my impression was that I had placed the figure on its side, and I must confess I felt a little surprised to find it turned over, lying on its back. ‘If it should be badly balanced and apt to roll over,’ I thought, ‘it will not prove such a bargain as I expected.’ In a day or two I was going home, and, as November days were short, there was little time to lose; therefore I went out again immediately to buy a large packing-case for my purchase. An oblong-shaped box would never do, being too suggestive of a coffin, and likely to cause a fuss at the railway station. I was fortunate enough to find a square one ready labelled ‘Objets d’Art.’ As the figure was so flexible, it could be easily doubled in half, and so travel without exciting remark.

It was evening when I returned to my rooms. I had dined, and

found the wine unusually good ; but I deny having taken too much. As I ascended the stairs I was startled by hearing a smothered laugh—a peculiar laugh, a very unnatural and unpleasant one. I paused to listen. The rooms immediately under mine were occupied by a comtesse, a *dévote* ; she had priests and nuns everlastingly coming to see her—a great amount of praying and



not much laughter, I should imagine. All remaining quiet, I ascended the next flight, entered the room, and lighted the bougies. The lay figure sat exactly the same as I had left it ; but let me advise people never to buy one with glass eyes ; it really was a most unpleasant sensation to see them shining and glittering in that large half-illuminated room : they appeared to be following all

my movements, and I was silly enough to dislike them so much as to throw the table-cover over the head and so shut them out. The following morning the packing-case arrived, the carpenter staying to assist me in placing the figure within it and to nail down the lid. The silly fellow appeared quite frightened, declaring it seemed half alive ; but ignorant people are so superstitious. Another four-and-twenty hours saw me on the Chemin de Fer du Nord, homeward bound, my packing-case in the luggage van. The longest halt was at Amiens, where I alighted for a cup of coffee. Judge of my astonishment, on returning to the train, to find guards, porters, and soldiers hauling the contents of the luggage van out upon the platform—boxes, trunks, portmanteaux, pell-mell, one thing upon another—all the assistants talking at once, all in a state of excitement ! What was the matter ? Was there an accident ? I got no answer. After completely emptying the van they examined its interior very carefully ; then, amidst much swearing, they pitched everything back again in still greater haste, for fear of being behind time. I remember they were particularly abusive to the man who rode in the luggage department, who looked as white as a sheet.

‘What’s wrong with that man ?’ I asked ; ‘is he ill ?’

‘No, monsieur,’ answered the guard ; ‘he is only a fool. He declares that all the way from Paris there has been a groaning and knocking as if somebody were hidden behind or *in* one of the boxes. Fool !’ Here he slammed to the carriage door, and off we went at great speed to make up for the minute or two that had been lost.

Arriving at Boulogne, I and my luggage went on board the steamer at once ; and a very bad, rough passage it was. Of course one does not expect the sea to be like a mill-pond in the month of November. On this occasion it was of leaden-coloured hue, with larger waves than I had ever seen in the Channel, and we made very little progress, one or the other of the paddles being always out of the water. ‘Never see’d anything like it,’ said the steward, ‘except when we’ve got a dead body on board !’ At last we reached Dover, and I do not think I ever felt so ill in my life—so giddy and faint that I determined to stay the night instead of proceeding to London.

The night was so cold, wet, and stormy, that I entered the first haven of rest, the ‘Lord Warden,’ or I should have proceeded to an hotel more in accordance with my means. My luggage was

placed in a lobby at a side door which opened to a yard beside the railway platform, in readiness for my departure the next morning, and I went to bed and soon fell asleep. I think I must have slept for about four hours, when I was aroused by the sound of many feet running under my window. At first I thought little of it, but presently the occupier of a room adjoining mine threw up his window, and called out to those below, asking what was the matter.

'We think there's a haccident on the line, sir,' was the answer. Imitating my neighbour's example, I also raised my sash and took a survey of the scene underneath, where much confusion prevailed. It was the yard close to the station, for through an archway I saw the line, where porters and others appeared very busy among the empty carriages with lanterns; men were hurrying to and fro, talking excitedly.

'What is it?' I called out in my turn.

'When the last train come in, sir, we're feared it run over somebody; the crying and groaning is hawful now and then—There: don't you hear un?' replied a servant of the hotel. I listened, the wind every minute blowing in great gusts from the sea. But there were also short spasmodic cries, at no very great distance, as if from some one in pain.

'Here comes the station master!' said the man, as that official, who had been knocked up from his sleep, made his appearance.

'Who is hurt? Where—what is it?' cried he, all on the alert.

'We can't make out, sir,' was the reply. 'After the last train come in we heard smothered cries like, and we've all been looking on the line with lights, but can't see nothing.'

'Just listen, sir,' exclaimed another.

'Poor creature—somebody's got jammed,' said the station master as a long wail was presently heard. 'Here—bear a hand—run the carriages down the metals—get the ambulance ready close by—give me a lantern—come with me!' and the good man sprang off the platform on to the line with alacrity. What followed I could not make out, for everybody disappeared; my neighbour grumbled about false alarms and being disturbed, closed his window with a bang, and went to bed again, I presume, as I soon after heard him snoring.

In about half an hour the domestics from the hotel re-entered the yard, and I called out, asking if they had found the poor creature.

'We've not found nobody nor nothing,' answered a man.
'Blest if any one knows who's hurt!'

'The crying an' groaning's stopped now, sir,' said another.
'You see the night-time is agin' us: we shall find out something
dreadful at daybreak, depend on that.'

But nothing was found up to the time I left Dover, or afterwards either, so far as I heard, and I looked in the papers diligently to see if any mention of it were made.

The following morning there was much talk in the coffee room about the disturbance of the previous night; all those sleeping on my side of the house had heard it.

'I think some one was playing a trick,' said a waiter.

'If a hoax, who was the hoaxter?' I asked.

'Well, sir, just as I come in from the side door to the lobby where that there luggage of this here gent's is stowed—it was past two o'clock in the morning then—I heard a smothered laugh like, as if some one was a-hiding behind the boxes and enjoying of the fun all to theirselves. I didn't see nobody; I was too tired to look, I can tell you; but take my word for it it was a hoax.'

I reside with my mother in a villa at Kensington, and have a studio built out into the garden, very convenient for the entrance of frame-makers and models and for the egress of my pictures, as it has a door opening on to the road, quite private. At this door I was set down, my lay figure having come in its box on the top of the cab. How I longed to show it off to my brother artists!

'Whatever have you got in that great packing-case, George?' asked my mother. But I would not satisfy her, as I wished to give her a surprise.

What with relating Parisian news to her, and in return hearing the events that had happened in my absence, it was dark when we left the dining-room.

'And now, George, I want to see your purchase,' said my mother.

I told Jane to bring a hammer and chisel; then entering my studio, I turned up the gas. After some little labour I got the lid off the case and lifted out the lay figure.

'Whatever is it?' exclaimed my mother, aghast.

'Ah—ah—a—!' screamed Jane.

'Don't be a fool!' I cried. 'What are you screaming at?'

'Ah! ah—wha—!' screamed Jane again, backing up to the wall and standing with horrified, distended eyeballs fixed on the figure. 'It's a woman, and she's alive! Look at her eyes!'

'You great silly!' I said angrily. 'Don't you see it's a lay figure, like my old one in the corner there? You were never frightened at that.'

'Oh, the old one is an innocent thing to what this is, sir. I'm sure she's alive.'

'It's got glass eyes, like a doll, mother,' I said, seeing that even she was looking at it askance. 'Very unnecessary to put them, but it is a French freak, I suppose. Isn't it a beauty?' and to show off my purchase I screwed the head round on the neck.

'Ah—ah—a—!' screamed Jane again. 'She's a-frowning—frowning awful at you, sir!'

'Jane,' said I sternly, 'leave the room this instant.'

'What a foolish young woman she is, to be sure!' I observed as she scuttled away.

'Well, to say the truth, George,' replied my mother, putting on her glasses and peering into my lay figure's cream-coloured face, 'I do not like the look of it myself. It's too beautifully made, too natural and like a real woman; unnecessarily so, I should say. Let us go away and leave it. See how the eyes seem staring at your old figure there in the corner.'

'I hope they won't fight,' I said in joke as we left the room, and I locked the studio door.

In the middle of the night we were aroused by the noise of something falling down in the painting-room. My mother got up and came to my chamber all of a tremble. 'My dear,' she said, 'I am afraid your new figure has fallen down. I do not think it can be housebreakers.'

'All is quiet now, mother,' I replied, listening. 'I'm afraid that lay figure is not well balanced; it turned over once before. However, I shan't get up in the cold unless I hear more noises. We shall see what it is in the morning.'

On entering the studio next day, there sat the figure as I had left it—but such a strange thing! my old battered English figure, which I had used for these twelve years past, lay overturned on the floor, stand and all! It really seemed as if the words I had spoken in jest were verified, and that the two figures *had* quarrelled.

My artist friends were all delighted with my purchase, and without exception wanted to borrow it. The joints were twisted and turned about in every conceivable manner. The mechanism and flexibility were pronounced unsurpassable in their workmanship. I promised to lend it to each by turn, and commenced with

it myself, attiring it in a black velvet dress and train trimmed with ermine, for a picture I was painting of Mary, Queen of Scots.

I do not think I ever executed drapery so well in my life as I did when painting from that figure ; the folds fell and clung so beautifully around its graceful form. But neither my mother nor Jane could get over their great dislike to it ; indeed, Jane declined to enter the studio at all, and, if obliged to bring me a letter, poked the tray in at the door, with her eyes fixed on the lay figure as if expecting it to pounce upon her. As she was a most excellent servant in other respects, and had been with us some time, we were obliged to humour her whims ; so of course my studio was not too tidy.

My mother about this time declared she heard footsteps walking about the studio in the small hours of the morning. As for me, I generally slept too soundly to hear anything, unless it were unusually startling.

Now it is a remarkable fact that, though I painted hour after hour, and day after day, from that lay figure, I never could see anything repulsive about it, as others did. My frame-maker, for instance—a worthy, respectable tradesman—was one of those who could not look at it. A young curate occasionally called upon me for local subscriptions ; he named it ‘the witch of Endor.’ Dr. Hollis, who attended my mother for her neuralgia, examining it, said its anatomy was perfect ; and his son, Jack Hollis, declared he should like to dissect it.

In the meantime I had sold my old lay figure to an artist residing at Liverpool, and did not allow myself to become prejudiced, by people who knew nothing about art, against my new one. Having finished the black velvet dress, I removed the figure to a corner of my studio.

Miss Lucy Hollis, daughter of the above-mentioned medical gentleman, had kindly given me sittings for the beautiful and unfortunate queen. She was a lovely, brilliant brunette, and a charming girl as well. When I invited her to sit for my picture, I was only very slightly acquainted with her, but after about seven sittings, of two hours each in duration, we began to feel as if we had known each other intimately all our lives. In fact, it led to her ultimately accepting an artist husband. But that was later on, and has nothing to do with the history of my Parisian lay figure. On one occasion when Lucy was giving me a sitting, I was engaged in taking the measurement of her pretty hand ; I was scarcely aware

of it, but perhaps I might have held it a trifle longer than was needful, when we were all startled by a deep, long-drawn sigh. ‘Good gracious!’ cried Lucy, starting up, ‘whatever was that?’

‘Was it not you, dear?’ said my mother, who was seated near the fire knitting, looking up in surprise.

No, it was neither of us. I looked under the couches and other furniture, thinking that perhaps an animal might be asleep beneath one of them. No, there was nothing.

‘How I do hate that horrid lay figure!’ said my mother, shaking her knitting-needles at it.

Now comes a very strange part of my story. Early the next morning, as I was dressing preparatory to going down to breakfast, Jane came to my door, asking me to step into my mother’s room, who appeared very ill.

‘My dear mother,’ I cried, ‘what is the matter?’ as I hurried in to her, to find her still in bed, looking very pale, faint, and ill.

‘Shut the door, dear, and come here.’ I obeyed her. ‘My dearest George,’ she said, taking my hand, ‘I am sure that you love me, and that there are few things you would refuse me, for I have tried to be a tender parent to you, my dear boy.’

‘That is true,’ said I, stooping to kiss her cold brow and remembering her self-denial in my early life, when I would be an artist, and how she, a widow, had so economised that my masters should be of the best. ‘That is true, dearest mother; there are few things in which I could say nay.’

‘I am about to make a serious request; it will entail a sacrifice on your part. I want you to get rid of that dreadful lay figure.’

‘Get rid of the lay figure? To be sure, easily enough. But why on earth should I get rid of it?’ I exclaimed.

‘Last night,’ continued my mother solemnly, ‘I awoke about three o’clock, I should imagine. My night light was burning as usual on the toilet table, when I saw my door, which you know I always leave ajar, slowly open and your lay figure enter. It advanced and stood at the side of the bed, looking at me in silence; but oh, George, the dreadful glitter of its eyes! They seemed to have a red flame behind them, and their expression was fiendish—fiendish! I was so overcome that I fainted. Destroy it, George, destroy it. Mark my words: it is a demon!’ My mother lay down again, quite overcome and trembling violently. She alarmed me, for ordinarily she was a person of good sense and not given to nervousness. That she had been much

frightened was plain ; but might she not have dreamt it ? I wiped her damp forehead with my handkerchief.

‘ Dear boy,’ she continued, holding my hand, ‘ do you remember me shaking my knitting-needles at it yesterday and calling it “ a horrid thing ” ? Oh ! I cannot rest with it in the house ! George, did you lock your studio door last night ? ’

I tried to remember, but could not recall whether I had done so or not—my head, you see, was occupied at that time by thinking of Lucy Hollis—so I ran downstairs to see. No. Strange to say, I had not locked my studio door ; in fact, it was partly open ! I hurried into the room, but there was my lay figure in the corner, just as it was yesterday. I examined the black velvet drapery, which I had carefully pinned and arranged to paint from ; it appeared to be undisturbed. My mother must have been dreaming. Still I could not retain the figure if it worried her, that was clear. It was vexatious, however, to part with such an acquisition, and be left without any figure at all for my use ; it had been foolish of me to sell my old one ; it was inconvenient and unpleasant. Yes, the figure must be sent out of the house, as it preyed on my mother’s nerves. But I need not sell it at present ; I would lend it about to my artist friends, who had been so anxious to borrow it. So I wrote a line telling O’Kelly that I would lend it to him first, if he would come and fetch it. O’Kelly was of course an Irishman : he had studied beside me at the Academy, and became a friend, always good-natured and pleasant, but rather too lively, being partial to playing silly practical jokes. He had private property, and took his profession easily, residing in handsome apartments in Harley Street, Cavendish Square. I had no doubt that if I ultimately made up my mind to sell my lay figure I should find a purchaser in him. He came over to Kensington directly he received my note, only too glad to get the loan of it. ‘ You may as well leave on the black velvet dress, old fellow. I’m painting the last days of Sir Thomas More, and it will do for Margaret Roper.’

‘ Very well,’ I said ; ‘ only please to remember I’ve hired that dress of Levi Zerubbabel, and left a ten-pounds deposit on it.’

‘ All right,’ said O’Kelly. We then rolled the figure up in a damask curtain, and he drove away with it in a four-wheeler with great glee.

My poor mother watched the departure from her bedroom window ; she thanked me most affectionately for acceding to her

request. She had certainly had a great shake in some way or other, though I could not reconcile her story with common sense. At any rate from that moment she began to get better, and Jane was as brisk as a bee, even asking my permission to give the studio a good cleaning, which in her reluctance to enter it had not received for some time. Everybody was satisfied except myself, who was left without anything to pose my drapery upon. I even wished for my old lay figure back again, clumsy though it was. Thereby hangs a moral : 'Do not part with a tried friend who has grown old and shabby for an unknown showy one.'

In the course of a few days I received a note from O'Kelly. He was painting in a very satisfactory manner, he said, from 'Madame,' as he called her ; but his postscript rather puzzled me; it ran thus : 'Do you think that lay figure is all right ?'

What on earth did he mean ? It was neither broken nor out of condition. Could it be that there really was something queer about it ? My curiosity did not allow me to rest, so I drove over to Harley Street to see about it that same evening. My friend was at home, and smoking his everlasting meerschaum beside a splendid fire in the spacious drawing-room, which he made his painting-room. The lay figure, posed in a graceful attitude, stood in the centre of the apartment. O'Kelly was delighted to see me, bringing out his decanters with Irish hospitality.

'Your postscript about that figure brings me here, O'Kelly,' said I.

'Did it surprise you, old boy ? I'm glad you've come any way ; and Madame's pleased herself, bedad ! I believe she's smiling at ye !' pointing to the figure with his pipe.

'Nonsense, O'Kelly !' I said, frowning. 'I will not listen to any chaff; I am in earnest. What did you mean in your postscript ? Is the figure broken ?'

For reply O'Kelly got up, crossed the spacious room stealthily, opened the door noiselessly, and peeped out. Seeing the coast was clear, he returned in the same mysterious manner to his seat.

'Well, George, this is just the gist of the matter. My landlady, Mrs. Munro, is a Scotchwoman ; to look at, she seems a plain, matter-of-fact body enough, but in reality she is as superstitious as the old jingleman himself. She is, sure ! Unfortunately she saw me bring Madame home. She declared it was a lady, and alive ; of course I convinced her to the contrary, but she's never let me have a moment's peace since. What do you think ? She will have

it'—whispering—‘that Madame walks about the house of a night !’

I cannot express how astonished I felt at having my mother's statement thus corroborated.

‘Yes,’ continued O’Kelly, ‘she says she hears Madame walking about this room, and come upstairs in the small hours of the mornings, and then descend again. Once she fancied in her sleep



she saw her come into her room and stand at the foot of the bed. Twice she has opened her door, thinking to catch the figure as it passed. She did not see anything, but heard the footsteps going downstairs, and a horrid, wicked, smothered laugh, as if some one were enjoying her discomfiture. She then hears this drawing-room door close. Strange, isn't it ?’

'Why do you not lock the drawing-room door of a night?' I asked, remembering a similar laugh I had myself heard at the hôtel in the Rue de la Paix.

'There's niver a key,' replied O'Kelly. 'Bless ye! we're like a family party in this house; there's no occasion to lock up. What I fear is that Mrs. Munro will give me notice to quit unless I give up Madame there. I'm so comfortable here that I don't want to leave, and that's a fact.' And he took a long, melancholy pull at his pipe.

I was in a brown study: what could I say?

'If I were in your place, O'Kelly, I would finish off Margaret Roper's gown directly, and then let Daubrey have the figure. I promised him the loan of it after you.'

'Well, if it must be it must; but it's real sorry I am!' sighed O'Kelly.

Now Daubrey was a fashionable portrait painter, always talking of the lovely countesses and marchionesses he was 'doing.' He was a great fop, but a nice fellow on the whole, and was only too delighted to receive 'Madame,' black velvet dress and all, for he was going to 'do' a dowager. Daubrey lived in Albion Street, Hyde Park, and thither the figure was speedily transferred. Just at that time he was absent on a visit to a country house. He was an agreeable, gay little fellow, singing drawing-room comic songs very well, full of anecdote and conversation, which portrait painters often excel in. These items ensured him plenty of invitations in the winter time.

My mother and I, though living very quietly, occasionally entertained our friends at a small dinner or evening party, and always had a little dance on my birthday, the 6th of February. This year it was intended to be a very pleasant *réunion*, for sweet Lucy Hollis, with her father and brother, were to be of the guests. We had a cheerful fire in the studio; it was wretchedly cold weather, and the snow lay deep. The studio was to be the ball-room, and I decorated it tastefully with evergreens, artificial flowers, and a flag or two. I hired an Erard, and engaged a pianoforte player and a violinist to play for the dancing. It proved a very bad night: the atmosphere was raw and foggy; then it rained, converting the snow into a deep, muddy slush. This did not much signify, most of the company, with the exception of O'Kelly, residing within easy access of us. We had a delightful evening indoors; everybody came. My mother seemed

to have recovered her spirits, and was quite herself again. Refreshments had been handed round, and we were in the middle of the Lancers, the time being about half-past ten o'clock, when we heard several knocks at the side door of the studio, which, as I previously described, gave egress to the road. Thinking it was some mischievous boys, attracted by the brilliant light from the large windows, no attention was paid to it; the dancing continued. Presently the rapping recommenced, louder and more peremptorily. As I did not care to have the door unfastened and opened unnecessarily to let in the cold night air, I told Jane to go to the hall door and call out, 'Who's there?' and ask what they wanted. Jane went; but, as there was no reply, we again set the interruption down to some mischievous persons, and finished the set of Lancers.

Whether it was the comparative quiet that made the knocking seem louder, or whether it really was louder, I know not, but several violent raps were now heard on the panels, accompanied by sobs and sharp spasmodic cries. Of course we were all silenced. 'Who's there? What do you want?' I called out from my side of the door. There was no answer, only sobbing.

'Some one had better go round outside and see who is there,' said my mother. 'Doubtless it is some poor houseless creature attracted by the lights and sounds of gaiety.' But now authoritative hammering, accompanied by the loud voice of a man, was heard.

'Open the door directly: I'm a policeman.'

Of course I unbolted the door directly, and was almost knocked down by a tall female form which fell upon me, and from me to the floor with a crash. I stooped to raise what appeared to be a mass of wet black velvet. To my dismay and utter astonishment I lifted my French lay figure!

'That poor thing's been a-crying and knocking at your door ever so long. I think she's fainted at last,' said the policeman.

'It's no poor thing at all!' I replied indignantly, turning the figure over on the floor with my foot, its glass eyes wide open and glistening in the light most unpleasantly as it lay on its back. 'Somebody has been playing a senseless trick. This is a lay figure—a life-sized doll, that is, such as artists dress in drapery to paint from.'

'Don't tell me,' said the intelligent officer; 'that there's a lady.'

'Come in, then, and judge for yourself; only *do* shut the door and keep the night air out,' said I. The man then entered, and

holding his bull's-eye close to the cream-coloured face examined it, and seemed puzzled and scared.

'This is one of your jokes,' I said to O'Kelly indignantly, 'a very silly one; and let me tell you I consider it extremely bad taste as well.'

O'Kelly strenuously denied all knowledge of the affair. I did not believe him.

'This pore thing's walked,' said the policeman, who was going on with his examination. 'Look at her stockings; look at the mud over her feet, no boots on; and what draggled skirts!'

We had all assembled round the recumbent figure, some holding candles, a merry party no longer, for this unexpected adventure had caused an uncomfortable break in our amusements and raised much curiosity.

'Look here,' said the policeman, holding up the velvet train, lined with what was once white fur; 'I declare it's all bedraggled with mud and soaked with snow-water a yard deep. The pore thing's walked.'

'What an obstinate man you are, to be sure!' cried I. 'How can a wooden dummy walk?' and I began twisting the hands and feet about to prove my words.

'Well, I never could have believed anythink could have been a-manufactured so natural-like—never!' said the policeman, who looked quite bewildered. 'Any way she was a-standin' agin' the door, and I could have swore she was a-knocking and a-crying to be let in; only, you see, ladies and gents, if she's only a image she couldn't have done it; and you were making such a noise with music and dancing. I suppose I was mistaken.'

'This is a shameful practical joke, Mr. O'Kelly,' said I once more to the puzzled Irishman, who stood staring at the lay figure, from which the mud and rain still oozed off on to the floor. 'You say you did not plan it, but no doubt you can give a good guess at who did. A shameful trick, especially as you were aware that I left ten pounds with Zerrubbabel for a deposit on the velvet dress, which is quite spoilt.'

'I'll pay the ten pounds, or twenty if you like,' cried O'Kelly earnestly; 'but, on the honour of a jintleman, I've had no more to do with it than you have had yourself.'

'Now, my good man,' said I to the policeman, 'if you have quite made up your mind that this is not a human being, perhaps you will be so good as to carry it round by the garden to the

tool house by the side of the conservatory ; then go to the kitchen and have some hot toddy and something to eat.'

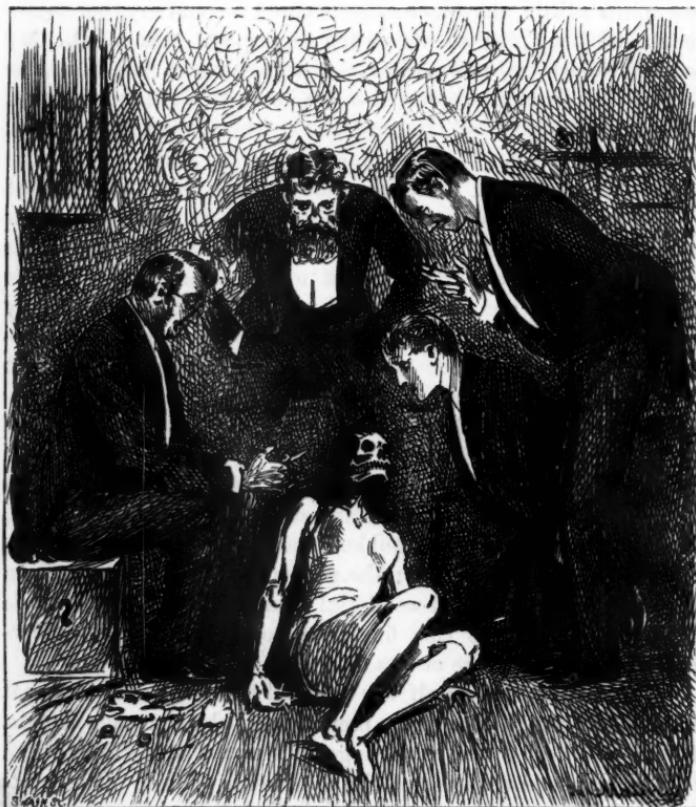
'Thank you kindly, sir,' said the officer, taking the wet lay figure in his arms. 'The cleverness and hingeneuity of the present day is allowed to be supprisin', but this here figur caps Dolly !'

Though this speech of the policeman had the effect of raising our spirits a little, the whole episode threw a cloud over our enjoyment, and truly glad we were when supper was announced. My mother looked very pale ; there was something so weird and unaccountable about the figure, in her opinion, that it unnerved her. Of course this joke of Daubrey's, as it was now set down to be, although he was not the kind of person to play jokes, was the one topic of conversation. O'Kelly, strange to say, had suddenly lost all his animation and become plunged in a brown study. Our party soon broke up ; all took their departure save Dr. Hollis, his son, and O'Kelly, who remained at my whispered request, for it had occurred to me that as the lay figure must be thoroughly spoilt by the soaking it had received it was worthless, and we would *dissect* it, as once proposed by Jack Hollis, and find out of what it was composed.

Informing my mother that we were going to have a cigar, we withdrew, and when the house was perfectly quiet repaired to the tool house and commenced undressing the figure. The dress was like a wet sponge, the outer silk and stocking-like skin the same. This we cut off with much trouble. Underneath was firm padding, formed exactly to the shape ; the principal muscles of the human body being imitated with wonderful accuracy. We tore off these paddings. What was this fine framework supporting it underneath ? Nothing more or less than a *human skeleton* !

Even Dr. Hollis himself was appalled by such a discovery. It was a small-boned, exquisitely proportioned skeleton of a female. By some process known to the ingenious manufacturer it had been 'vulcanised,' and rendered of the consistence of iron. The joints were most beautifully substituted by wheels and sockets formed of fine steel and brass, resembling the work of a watchmaker, turning with ease in exact reproduction of a living person. The time, the toil, the ingenuity and patience this model—for such it was—must have taken to become what it was, was incredible. And for what purpose ? The face, so finely enamelled, was the original cranium, upon which the scalp with the long black hair remained—the hair

I had admired for being, as I thought, so artistically worked in ! It was horrible. Had this work been done during the long months of the siege of Paris as an amusement or revenge ? Had these bones belonged to a victim or a criminal ? I shuddered. What demonology would explain such a mystery ? Whence had my Parisian dealer obtained it ? That he knew well enough there was



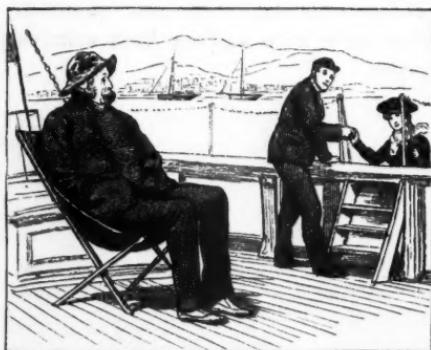
something sinister pertaining to the lay figure, as he called it, I was now certain, recalling the manner in which it had been corded to the wall, his jeering expression of face, and again the recommendation of the boy Henri to keep the studio door locked. Had a demon possessed it ?

Dr. Hollis placed the head and bones, all now separated, in a

box, and he and his son carried it away with them to his surgery. He afterwards arranged with the sexton of a neighbouring cemetery to bury it in a corner of consecrated ground. The exquisite steel and brass joints were all thrown into the Thames from Hammersmith Suspension Bridge. The padding was burnt by myself and O'Kelly in the tool house before we separated the next morning.

We could not have taken more care had we been criminals bent on getting rid of a corpse.

THE OLD WOMAN OF THE SEA.



NEARLY every man, I should think, must sometimes feel in doubt as to whether he has not ordered the course of his life after an altogether erroneous fashion; and if he be, as I am, an old bachelor, I hardly see how he is to escape such occasional mis-

givings. A sight—a sound—a scent suddenly takes us back to those half-forgotten days when we were young; we call to mind what once was; we realise what might be now, had not this, that, and the other thing occurred, and we find ourselves muttering under our breath, ‘Ah, dear me ! what a mistake it has all been, to be sure !’

I believe, indeed, that it was only the lively strains of the Hungarian band which prevented these very words from being heard to fall from my lips as I stood in the doorway of a London ball-room, and watched Alice Wynne dancing with young Charles Stapleton, to whom her engagement had been announced a few days before. It so happened that I myself had often danced in that very same house, I won’t say how many years ago, when its present owners were in the nursery, when heads which are bald and grey now were as curly as Charles Stapleton’s, and when a host of dead people were alive and merry ; and standing there unnoticed, as dogs who have had their day must expect to be, I lost sight for a minute or two of the modern young men and women who were gyrating before me, and beheld the long room thronged with ghosts, among whom one especial ghost may perhaps have been more prominent than the rest. I say one can’t avoid these memories and regrets. They come upon one when one least expects it, and make one feel most confoundedly foolish and uneasy. As a general thing I am pretty well con-

tented with my manner of existence, such as it is ; but when one is an old man and a rich man, and when one sees Tom, Dick, and Harry with their sons and daughters about them, and their houses full of friends, and with a hundred interests in life not directly connected with their own persons, celibacy does somehow present itself to one in the light of a defiance of obvious duty and destiny. Why I have never married is a question which concerns no one except myself ; but I own that I have sometimes doubted whether my reason was a sufficient one, and whether I should not have done better to take a wife—any wife. Dr. Johnson thought that if all marriages were arranged by the Lord Chancellor the result would be quite as satisfactory as that obtained from the ordinary English method, and I am not prepared to say that that unromantic philosopher was wholly in the wrong. There is no denying that matches of affection frequently turn out badly, while matches of convenience frequently turn out well. One can't have everything in this give-and-take world, and the sight of two young people unmistakably in love with each other, yet brought together by their elders from motives of the purest worldliness, is as rare a one as it is delightful to witness.

So I leant against the doorway, absorbed in musings with which Stapleton and Miss Wynne were only in part connected, until a brisk voice at my elbow cried, ‘A penny for your thoughts, General Rivers ! Do you know that you are looking quite sentimental ?’

‘I was looking at your daughter and Lord Charles, Mrs. Wynne,’ I said ; for it was the mother of the bride-elect who had addressed me.

‘Ah, dear child !’ she sighed, ‘it is such a happiness to me to see her happy ; and I know you rejoice with us. But this makes us seem terribly old, doesn’t it ?’

‘Well, you know, we *are* rather old,’ I replied bluntly ; and I don’t think she quite liked it. The truth is that Mrs. Wynne is a contemporary of my own, or thereabouts ; but I am bound to confess that she looks a good twenty years younger. I glanced at her after I had made this uncivil remark, and I could not help admiring the marvellous perfection of her make-up. Her face was painted, and so were her delicately-traced eyebrows ; but the work betrayed the touch of a finished artist. The brown hair which clustered in little curls all over her head and came down low upon her forehead was a wig most likely, though it looked

uncommonly natural ; but how on earth had she achieved those youthful shoulders and arms ? She wore a low dress—in fact, a very low dress—and I declare that the charms which she displayed might have been those of a woman of five-and-twenty. I was privileged to behold a set of beautifully regular and pearly teeth (false ones, I suppose) when she smiled upon me and murmured :

‘ But not too old to be a little sentimental sometimes, eh, General ? ’



‘ Oh, I shall have occasional fits of sentimentality up to my dying day, I expect. It’s the weather—or the gout coming on ; it doesn’t mean anything,’ I returned hastily ; for something in the woman’s look and manner affected me with a vague feeling of alarm.

But she said : ‘ Ah ! don’t let us be ashamed of having hearts and memories. The world makes us all hard, whether we will or no ; but we need not boast of it. Come and sit down in the next room, General Rivers, and we will be sentimental together for a quarter of an hour.’

I saw no reason why we shouldn't. We retired into a small, dimly-lighted boudoir adjoining the ball-room, and talked very pleasantly about bygone days for more than the allotted quarter of an hour. She made a good deal of pretence of being younger than I was ; she affected ignorance of events which she could not really have forgotten and of persons with whom I myself had seen her flirting in the consulship of Plancus ; but she seemed to be interested in what I said, and showed more power of participating in my melancholy mood than I should have given her credit for. I have always admitted that Mrs. Wynne can be a very agreeable woman when she likes. The worst of me is that I am so easily imposed upon. Of course I knew that this shocking old sham was likely to be as false in her sentiment as she was in her person ; yet when she spoke affectionately of the daughter whom she was about to lose, turning on a sort of *tremolo* stop in her voice as she did so—when she appealed to me to say what she was to do with her life after its chief interest had been removed—and when she alluded with a sigh to the trials and sorrows which she had passed through and lived down—I was touched. I said to myself that one does not necessarily become a hardened reprobate because one is a little worldly. As far as that went, wasn't I also a little worldly ? I thought I could enter into poor Mrs. Wynne's natural feeling of loneliness, and I was ashamed of the half suspicion which had entered my mind for a moment that she might be setting her cap—or rather her curly wig—at me.

Not, to be sure, that there would have been anything very extraordinary in it if she had, seeing that, many years before, she had married a man considerably older than I am now. That was her second matrimonial venture—her first husband, a dashing young hussar, having broken his neck steeplechasing, I forget where. Old Wynne died very soon after his little girl's birth, which was an unlucky thing for some people. His estates passed to his nephew, to spite whom he had married, and his widow was left but scantily provided for. I fancy that she must have found it a hard matter to keep her head above water, living in the way that she did ; but she managed it somehow, and never allowed herself to drop out of society. When Alice was old enough to come out, the two ladies went to the first drawing-room of the season together ; and I think it was then that Mrs. Wynne assumed that surprisingly youthful aspect which caused her,

when seen from a sufficient distance, to look like her daughter's younger sister. No doubt she had to swallow down some snubs and slights; for she was an impoverished woman who was bound to live like a moderately rich one, under penalty of being forgotten, and we all know how little mercy is shown by the world to those who deliberately place themselves in false positions. Nevertheless, she did not suffer herself to be discouraged, and now she had reaped the reward of her labours. She had secured a husband for her daughter who was not only the younger son of a duke, but was far better off than younger sons generally are, some member of his mother's family having left him a handsome property.

I felt a genuine satisfaction at her success; for one likes to see pluck recompensed, and besides, I had known Mrs. Wynne all my life, though I can't say that we had ever been exactly friends. After that evening at the ball, however, she was pleased to treat me quite like a friend—an intimate friend, indeed. We never met anywhere that she did not drag me off into a corner to whisper some confidential piece of information about Alice's approaching nuptials, or to consult me as to some point connected with settlements, although one would have supposed that she might have obtained from her solicitor all the advice that she needed upon such subjects. And then she was always sending me little unnecessary notes, till at last I grew positively to loathe the sight of the buff-coloured envelopes which she used, and Wilson, my man, smiled demurely when he handed them to me. Now, if there is one thing that I dislike more than another, it is being laughed at by Wilson; and what was perhaps even more disagreeable was that the men at the club began to chaff me, my old friend Conington in particular being exquisitely facetious, inquiring whether the double event was to come off on the same day, and so forth. I was obliged to tell him at length that that kind of thing, besides being utterly witless, was offensive to me; to which he replied that he only did it out of kindness.

'My good fellow, you can't take care of yourself,' he said, 'and if somebody didn't catch hold of your coat-tails you'd be swallowed up before you knew where you were. Our friend Mrs. Wynne is a good deal cleverer than you are, I can tell you.'

'Very likely,' I returned; 'I never said she wasn't.'

'Yes; and she's a fascinating woman too, in her way.'

'I don't find her so,' I said; 'but I suppose you do, for you

are always talking to her. Perhaps you would like to marry her yourself. If so, pray don't let me stand in your way.'

Conington shook his head with a wise smile. 'I'm too old a bird,' he answered; 'and she knows that well enough. She won't waste time in trying to drop salt on my tail. She knows I recollect her ages and ages ago as an old thing with grey hair and false teeth that waggled at you when she talked. She goes in for being a sort of Ninon de l'Enclos now; but that won't do with *me*, you know.'

As far as that went, it wouldn't do with me either; and, though I did not remember to have seen Mrs. Wynne in the stage described, I was sure that, whether she had designs upon me or not, I should never fall a victim to her borrowed charms. Still I did feel that it would be a comfort when the wedding was over and the excuse for all these interviews and notes removed. To add to my discomfort, the ladies of my acquaintance began with one consent to give me friendly warnings; and then, only a week before the day appointed for the ceremony, a very annoying thing took place.

'My dear General,' Mrs. Wynne said one morning, squeezing my hand affectionately (she had taken to squeezing my hand by this time), 'I want you to do me a *great* kindness. I want you to give dear Alice away.'

'I?—give your daughter away?' I ejaculated, aghast. 'Well, upon my word, I don't think I am quite the right person—'

'Ah, don't refuse!' she broke in. 'I am sure you won't refuse! You know she has literally *no* near relations, poor child, and James Wynne, who was to have represented the family, is laid up with chicken-pox and can't come. Unless you will help me out of the difficulty, I don't see who there is to apply to, except the verger.'

'Couldn't you put it off until James Wynne is better?' I suggested.

'Oh dear, no! Quite impossible! It might be weeks and weeks. Some people take an eternity to get over the measles, and—'

'You said it was chicken-pox just now,' I interrupted suspiciously.

'Oh, well, it doesn't matter what it is,' she returned. 'You couldn't expect him to come into church all over spots and scatter infection among a hundred and fifty people, could you?'

'I suppose not,' I agreed. It really was a very cool request to make, and no doubt Conington and other resolute persons would have refused point-blank; but I never can bring myself to be rude to people, unless I am goaded into absolute fury, so I ended by yielding a reluctant consent.

I performed the duty required of me when the festive day came, feeling perfectly wretched the whole time, and not daring to look at anybody; and it was only when the rite was over and we were assembled round the breakfast table that I recognised James Wynne among the company, looking as well and hearty as I had ever seen him in my life. This was too much. I made my escape as soon as possible, only darting one glance of bitter reproach at that Sapphira of a woman, and early the next day I left town and fled into Dorsetshire to stay with some cousins of mine who had asked me, very opportunely, to pay them a visit.

I did think I should have been safe there, with the London season only just over and everybody hastening to Goodwood, where I rather wanted to have gone myself; but no such thing! I hadn't been two days in the house when Mrs. Wynne arrived, looking more juvenile and blooming than ever; and I found out afterwards that she had actually asked herself down—my poor cousins, who knew nothing of what had taken place in London, welcoming her with the utmost cordiality. Ah, how differently would they have behaved had they guessed the predatory intentions of their visitor with regard to one whose worldly goods may not improbably be divided among them some day!

Mrs. Wynne could not, of course, blush, her natural skin being for ever hidden from mortal eye; and, morally speaking, I should say that she had the hide of rhinoceros. She did not appear to be in the least ashamed of having compromised me in the eyes of all my friends by that unspeakably shabby trick of hers, and I felt that no words of mine would be likely to produce any impression upon such brazen effrontery. I therefore maintained an attitude of cold reserve, only taking good care not to be left alone with her for a single moment. But I need hardly say that she broke down my defence with the greatest ease as soon as she thought fit to do so. She waylaid me on the staircase, as I was making for the smoking-room, on the second evening after her arrival, and, touching me gently on the arm, 'You are angry with me,' said she, in a tone of soft remonstrance. 'What have I done to offend you?'

'I am not offended, Mrs. Wynne,' I replied ; 'but, since you ask me, I will confess that I am annoyed at your having thought it necessary to tell me a—what shall I say?—about James Wynne.'

'But I didn't tell you a what-shall-you-say,' she rejoined, laughing. 'He really had something the matter with him. It turned out to be only a cold in the head ; still it might quite well have prevented him from coming. And I was not at all sorry for the mistake. I don't like James—we have never got on together—and it was much pleasanter to me to see an old friend like yourself standing where you did. I think you ought to be flattered,' she added, with a killing smile.

'I am *not* flattered,' I replied gloomily ; for I thought it best to be explicit. 'I don't like to be made conspicuous in that uncalled-for way.'

'Oh, how rude you are !' she exclaimed, laughing, and rapping me on the knuckles with her fan. 'I shall not speak to you again until you have found your manners.'

And she turned and ran up the stairs with the buoyant step of careless girlhood.

This was all very well ; and if, by dint of bad manners, I could have persuaded her to carry out her threat of not speaking to me any more, mannerless I should have remained. But she didn't carry out her threat. Far from it ! On the contrary, she spoke to me a great deal ; and the things that she said were so startling that I hardly knew which way to look when she uttered them, while my cousins, who had begun by being amused at her, ended by becoming indignant. Any one, to hear her talk, would have supposed that I had almost lived in her house in London—that little Mayfair house which she had rented for some years past, and which she now announced that she intended, by my advice, to quit. 'Certainly I should find it dreary work to go on living all by myself where I have been so happy with my poor little girl,' she said ; 'I dare say it is better that I should make a change. Where I shall go or what I shall do I can't think ; but my dear, kind old friend' (it was thus that she was pleased to designate the reader's humble servant) 'has promised to find me a home somewhere before long.'

Now it was true that, while in London, she had told me that she contemplated a change of quarters, and had begged me to let her know if I heard of anything that sounded suitable ; but the

impression conveyed by her words was something very different from this, and my cousins not unnaturally concluded that I either meant to marry Mrs. Wynne or that I had been trifling with her affections. Of these two alternatives the latter would no doubt have been the more agreeable to them; but in either case they would have felt justified in regarding me with that pity which is not akin to love, and they showed in the plainest manner that they did so regard me.

All these things being so, there was nothing for it but a second and a longer flight. My yacht was waiting for me at Portsmouth. I determined to go on board at once and sail for Norway as soon as I could possibly get off. I did not want to do this. I am not much of a fisherman; and besides, there is very little salmon-fishing to be obtained by the casual traveller in Norway nowadays. Moreover, I have reached that time of life when a man likes to do the same things year after year. It throws me out, and gives me an uneasy, fidgety feeling of having forgotten something, if I am not at Cowes for the Squadron regatta, at Weymouth, Dartmouth, and Torquay shortly afterwards, and in Scotland by the beginning of September. But it was not a case for consulting one's inclinations. I telegraphed to two or three men to join me, and left precipitately, allowing it to be inferred that I was bound for no more distant waters than those of the Solent.

The truth of the matter was that that shameless and unscrupulous woman had taken an accurate measure of my character and had found out my weak points. She knew—at least, I suppose she did—that blandishments would have no sort of effect upon me; but doubtless she also knew that there was scarcely any foolish thing that I would not do, rather than have a disturbance. Her tactics were obvious. She intended to make me compromise myself and her before witnesses and then throw herself upon my generosity, or my feebleness, whichever it ought to be called; and if I had not happened to be fully alive to this danger, it is quite upon the cards that she might have succeeded. As it was, I got three friends to accompany me and sailed for Stavanger before the end of the week.

When I had placed the tumbling waves of the North Sea between me and my dreadful old woman, I breathed more freely, and my temper, which I was told had been rather short during the passage, recovered its wonted sweetness. I felt that I had been delivered from a great and imminent peril. People who sneer at

panics of this kind, and say that a woman can't marry a man against his will, and so forth, simply don't know what they are talking about. I maintain that there are occasions upon which it behoves the bravest of men to run away.

We spent a very pleasant three weeks in dawdling along the west coast of Norway. It was a little late in the year, but the weather, for once in a way, was propitious, and the magnificent fjords, which are so often shrouded in rain and mist, showed themselves to us, day after day, in unclouded grandeur. My friends were kind enough not to be too exacting. I could not put them in the way of getting any sport; but they said the scenery and the sunshine would do instead, and professed themselves satisfied with an occasional drive up unfrequentated valleys or a climb to the glaciers which overhang the Hardanger Fjord and its branches.

One evening we had all gone ashore at Eide, and were strolling along and gazing at the sunset, when a string of carioles was seen approaching us, in the foremost of which was seated a lady whom my companions at once pronounced to be an Englishwoman. They further remarked that she was an uncommonly well turned-out one too. As for me, I said never a word; but my heart became as water within me. Ah me! that trim figure, that bottle-green Newmarket, that billycock hat, those neat little boots which rested in the stirrups of the cariole—had I not recognised them from afar? Oh, my prophetic soul!—my old woman!

She was grasping my hand before I knew where I was. Who would have thought of meeting *me* in Norway? This was really delightful! She had been so much pressed to come over by her friends the Somebodys (I don't remember their name—they must have been strange people) that at last she had consented; and now she was so glad she had come! She added, with one of those finger-squeezes which always made me feel hot and cold all over, ‘How horrid of you to run away like that! And never even to tell me where you were going!’

‘It seems that you found out, though,’ said I, too much perturbed to observe the decent reticences of polite society.

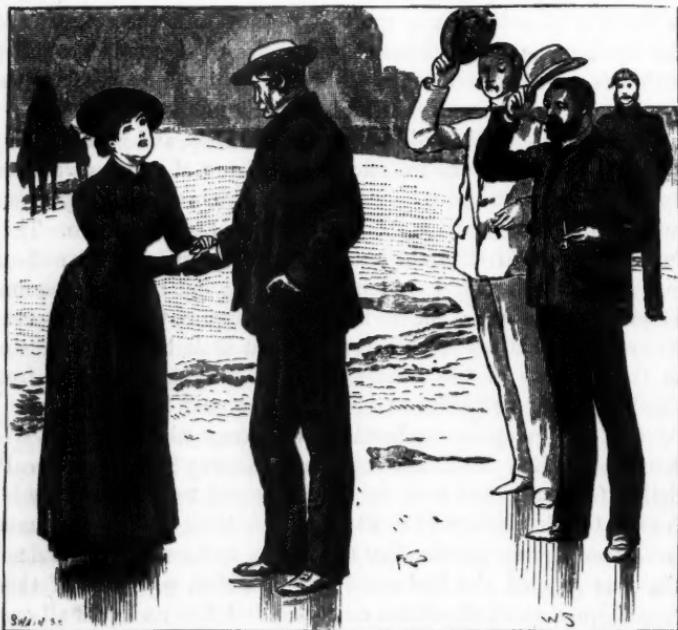
She looked at me with an innocent wonder in those artistically enlarged eyes of hers. ‘Well, yes; I have found you,’ she answered; ‘but that is no thanks to you. I hope you are glad to be found. Now we must make some pleasant excursions together. I hear that there is a great deal to be seen in this neighbourhood.’

‘Oh, yes; we'll make some pleasant excursions together and

'we'll see the neighbourhood,' I echoed grimly. 'Does that schooner yacht lying alongside of us belong to your friends ?'

She said it did, and I remembered having examined the vessel and having noticed that she had no auxiliary steam. A strong wind was blowing straight up the fjord too, and likely to hold—come ! there was balm in Gilead after all.

Yet I was obliged to ask Mrs. Wynne to dine on board that evening. I didn't see my way to getting out of it. One of the men who were with me was already acquainted with her ; she made her-



self exceedingly agreeable to the others ; and in short, if I had not asked her, she would have asked herself ; so that it didn't make much difference. I felt sure that I should pass a detestable evening, and my expectations were not disappointed. That woman's behaviour was downright outrageous. Not only did she display an affectionate interest in my every proceeding ; not only did she warn me, in a tone of quasi-wifely remonstrance, what I ought not to eat and drink, on account of my gout ; but she would persist in talking as if our meeting had been the result of a pre-

concerted arrangement. It was quite evident that all those who saw and heard her set her down as the future Mrs. Rivers; and, in point of fact, she went as near to saying so as was possible. After dinner I made a feeble effort to convey to her my fixed determination to live and die a bachelor; but she only laughed and affected to misunderstand me. Had I not, most mercifully, had steam-power at my command, I believe I should have been driven to throw myself upon her compassion and implore her to leave me alone. She did not go away until quite late; and the moment that she had vanished into the darkness, I gave orders to my captain to get under way with the first streak of dawn. ‘There is no one to tell her where I have gone, and she can’t scour the high seas in pursuit of me,’ I thought.

I am afraid my companions were not best pleased when, on waking up in the morning and finding themselves already out at sea, they were informed that our destination was Kirkwall; but I couldn’t help that. A man must be allowed to command on board his own yacht, and though we had a rough passage across and some of us were sea-sick, there was no use in grumbling about it. When we were safe on the other side, I explained that one couldn’t count upon the weather at that season of the year, and that it would have been very disagreeable to be bottled up at Bergen or Trondhjem for three weeks together. We finished our cruise among the Hebrides and the other islands of the west coast of Scotland, and I reflected gleefully within myself that Mrs. Wynne could not possibly know what had become of me this time.

Towards the end of September my friends left me. It was growing cold, and I had had quite enough of yachting; yet I felt that there could be no real safety for me except in a seafaring life. I had made several engagements to stay with different people then and during the following month; but I was not going to run the risk of meeting Mrs. Wynne in a country house, so I wrote off excuses to everybody, and made up my mind to go round to Portsmouth in the yacht.

After we had been detained for some days at Oban by bad weather, the wind shifted to the north-east, and we got a cold, bright morning, which looked suitable for making a start. Seated on deck, I was watching the men getting up the anchor, and was ruminating a little sadly upon the infirmities which make themselves felt with advancing years and the many worries which appear to be inseparable from existence. Nothing is so disastrous

to my liver as a touch of east wind. I knew that I ought to be sitting before a good fire instead of upon that draughty deck, and it seemed a little hard that I must be exposed to all the inclemencies of the season because a brazen old woman had taken it into her head that she would like to have the spending of my money. While I was musing thus, I thought I heard somebody hail us ; but I did not move, knowing that I had no acquaintances in the place who were likely to be coming on board. Presently I saw Jackson, my skipper, walk aft ; then he took off his cap to somebody ; and then—oh, horror !—the head and shoulders of Mrs. Wynne appeared over the side. The rest of her person followed quickly, and behind her loomed up—could I believe my eyes ?—a huge portmanteau. Then came another portmanteau, and then a travelling-bag, a bundle of shawls, and a dressing-case. What in heaven's name could it all mean ?

I was not left long in doubt. Mrs. Wynne came tripping across the deck towards me on the tips of her toes, her hands outstretched, and her painted countenance all smiles. ‘My dear General,’ she began—‘my dear friend, what *will* you think of me ?’

‘I don't know,’ I groaned ; ‘I don't know what to think. Perhaps you will explain.’

‘I was afraid you would be rather astonished at first,’ she said, ‘but then I thought I might surely venture upon taking a little liberty with *you*, and I was certain that you would be too kind to refuse me such a trifling favour as taking me round to the Clyde with you. I know you are going south, and it's all on your way.’

‘Gracious mercy !’ I ejaculated, but she held up her hand entreatingly.

‘Now do allow me to finish. I was just going to tell you how it has happened that I am stranded here all by myself. Those people with whom I was yachting in Norway were to have picked me up here and taken me to Glasgow, where I positively must be by to-morrow night in time to catch the mail, and only this morning I had a telegram from them to say that they were weather-bound somewhere up north, and could not possibly be here for several days. Wasn't it too tiresome ? I am always so nervous about travelling alone, and I haven't even got my maid with me. I was quite in despair till I caught sight of your yacht, and heard that you were on the point of starting for the south. It was as if you had been sent specially by Providence to save me.’

I could not think that Providence would have served me such a dirty turn as that; but it was idle to dispute the assertion. What was evident was that nothing but the greatest firmness and presence of mind could save *me*.

'Mrs. Wynne,' I said gravely, 'what you ask me to do is out of the question—utterly out of the question, believe me. You have not, I suppose, realised that I am alone on board?'

'Oh, are you?' she returned, not a whit abashed; 'I am very glad of it. We shall have the more time for a quiet chat; and I want to consult you about a heap of things.'

'But, my dear good lady,' I exclaimed impatiently, 'we can't put to sea for a day and a night all by ourselves. It wouldn't do. It wouldn't be proper, you know.'

'As if it signified!' she cried. 'Such old friends as you and I!'

'Oh, we are old enough for anything,' I agreed; 'I quite admit that. We are old enough to know better. You must be aware that age is no protection from slander, and that people are sure to say—'

'I don't care a straw what people say,' she interrupted audaciously.

'Possibly not; but the difference between us is that I do,' I remarked. After which there was a pause.

During this colloquy Jackson had been hovering near us with a face expressive of the most profound astonishment, and I thought it would be better to go below before embarking upon the altercation which was now inevitable. 'Would you mind coming into the main cabin with me?' I asked Mrs. Wynne. Then I told Jackson that I should not want to get under way just yet, and followed my persecutor's blue serge skirt down the companion.

She began flitting about at once and examining everything. 'What a pretty cabin! You are quite a sybarite. Who arranges your flowers for you? And which is to be my berth?'

Now or never, I felt, was the time for me to show of what stuff I was made.

'Mrs. Wynne,' I answered, gently but decisively, 'you will not occupy any berth on board this vessel, I am sorry to say. It is painful to me to be obliged to be so inhospitable; but I am persuaded that, when you think things over quietly, you will see that I have no choice in the matter. I have a duty to perform, and I shall not shrink from performing it.'

'What are you going to do?' she asked; and I was glad to notice a shade of apprehension in her voice.

'I am going,' I replied, 'to put you on shore immediately. I am going to escort you to the steamboat-office or the railway station, whichever you prefer, and I am going to take your ticket for Glasgow and see you safely off.'

'How unkind you are!' she cried; 'and how ridiculously prudish! What if we *are* doing something that Mrs. Grundy wouldn't approve of? People will never hear of it. Who is to tell them?'

I knew very well who would tell them; but I did not say this. I only replied mildly that I was very sorry, but that there was no help for it. Go she must.

'I won't go!' she exclaimed abruptly; 'I won't be turned into a laughing-stock because of your absurd scruples. If I had had any idea that you would be so very disagreeable, I should never have come on board; but now that I am here I shall stay. And I do think you might have some little consideration for me. I am not accustomed to travelling about alone, and there are all sorts of horrid tourists and people in these trains and steamers. One might have one's pocket picked, or be insulted, or—or fifty things.'

'I am protecting you against yourself,' answered I sententiously; 'I value your reputation more even than your comfort.'

'Bother my reputation!' called out Mrs. Wynne with alarming recklessness. 'Why, if the worst came to the worst, what could people say?'

'Well,' replied I, 'I am afraid they could, and would, say that—we were going to be married.'

'And would that be such a terrible calamity?'

My blood curdled in my veins when Mrs. Wynne put this question in her most insinuating manner, accompanying it with an upward glance which spoke volumes. I knew that she was not the woman to stick at a trifle; but I really had not expected that she would propose to me in so many words. I confess that I lost my head for the moment, and hardly knew what I was saying.

'It would indeed!' I cried eagerly. 'Any woman who married me would be going in for a truly calamitous thing. In fact her whole life afterwards would be one long calamity, so to speak. My temper is awful—you might not suppose it, but it is. I have several organic complaints which are bound to make an end of

me in a year or two, and when I die all my landed property will go to my cousin. As for my personality, I have invested largely of late in Turkish and South American securities, and the result is what no one can foretell. And besides all this, I am absolutely and irrevocably determined not to marry anybody. I never have married, and—and at my time of life it is not likely that I should begin.'

Mrs. Wynne stared at me as if she thought I had taken leave of my senses; and indeed she might have been excused for believing what was so nearly the truth. Then she laughed a little. 'Really, my dear General,' she said, 'one would suppose that I had asked you to marry me, instead of only begging you to take me as far as the mouth of the Clyde.'

'It's the same thing,' answered I despondently, feeling a little ashamed of my vehemence. But no sooner had the words passed my lips than I saw, by the gleam in her eyes, what a dangerous admission I had made, and I hastened to correct it.

'At least,' I added hurriedly, 'it would be the same thing in the eyes of the world. I should not, of course, marry you; but everybody would say that you had tried to make me do so.'

She started to her feet and paced up and down the cabin once or twice with an agitated step. Then all of a sudden she exclaimed, 'How can you say such cruel things?' and, dropping into an arm-chair, burst into tears.

In a general way I am as wax in the hands of those who weep at me; but I suppose there must be an undercurrent of brutality in my nature which rises to the surface when I am driven to desperation. I astonished myself by the callous insensibility with which I said—'I wouldn't cry if I were you. You may leave unbecoming traces upon your cheeks, you know, and we are far from all the resources of civilisation in these parts.'

I thought that would rouse her. It did.

'You *wretch!*' she shrieked; 'I don't paint my cheeks. spiteful women say I do—they say that of everybody who has a decent complexion, but it's a falsehood. I can convince you of it if you choose. Would you like to see me wash my face?'

'No,' I answered unfeelingly, 'I should not. The question doesn't interest or concern me in any way. I don't care if you never wash your face again.'

'You insult me!' she exclaimed.

'I am aware of it,' returned I. 'I have insulted you grossly,

and if you have a spark of self-respect you can't possibly remain on board. I shall go up on deck for five minutes to give you time to compose yourself a little, and then we will go ashore.'

I will confess that, when I had left Mrs. Wynne, my conduct struck me as having been atrocious, but then the provocation had been great, and my remorse was assuaged in some measure by the pride of conquest. The only question was, had I conquered after all? Supposing that she obstinately declined to retreat, what was I to do? I couldn't put her on shore by main force. Possibly it might have been wiser to have recourse to some stratagem than to defy one who had neither pity nor principle. While I thus communed with myself I was absently gazing at a large yawl which had come in while I had been below, and was bringing up within a short distance of us. I seemed to know the look of her, but it was only when Jackson joined me, and said, "‘*Skyrocket*,’ just in from Portree, sir;’ that I recognised Conington’s yacht, the ‘*Scirocco*,’ and there, sure enough, was Conington himself on deck, waving friendly signals to me.

It is a kindly provision on the part of Nature that our most brilliant inspirations generally come to us in moments of the greatest emergency. I don’t know what it was that suddenly made me think of the man who, while elbowing his way through a crowd, had a baby placed in his arms, and who, with the utmost presence of mind, popped it into a passing carriage and ran away. Why, I asked myself—my heart beginning to beat wildly—why should not this precedent be applied to me and my old woman of the sea? It was a stirring thought. With a rapidity of which I should not have believed myself capable, I conceived and grasped every detail of a bold design, and, without hesitating for a moment, I ran down the companion to put it into execution.

Mrs. Wynne was sitting where I had left her; but she had dried her eyes. She wore—if I may be allowed to use so ungalant a comparison—very much the air of a donkey who has planted his forefeet firmly on the ground, laid back his ears, and tucked his tail between his legs. ‘No surrender’ was written on every line of her countenance. It must have been a surprise to her to see me walk in delicately like King Agag, and to hear me address her in gentle, conciliatory accents.

‘Mrs. Wynne,’ said I, ‘I have come to make my apologies. I feel that I spoke hastily and rudely just now. Shall we agree to forget that painful scene, and sail for the Clyde as if nothing had

happened? When all is said and done, why should an old man care for the world and its harsh judgments?

She jumped up with a little cry of pleasure, and for an instant I thought she was going to embrace me. However, I executed a backward bound and pushed a chair between us, so as to preclude any surprises of that nature, after which I went on with my scheme of heartless deception. I remember to have felt a sort of dull wonder at my own duplicity, but for the time being I was really dead to all sense of shame. I said, ‘Let us go up into the fresh air;’ and she cheerfully acceded to this proposal.

As soon as we were on deck, I affected much surprise at becoming aware of the ‘Scirocco.’ ‘Dear me!’ I cried, ‘there is Conington’s yacht; and surely that is Conington himself beckoning to us. Suppose we go on board for five minutes and see him.’

My manner was composed, but I was trembling all over with suppressed anxiety. Would she yield? would she fall into the trap? To my boundless relief, she did. From the alacrity with which she consented, and from the expression of triumph which she vainly strove to conceal, I saw that she not only suspected nothing, but was overjoyed at this opportunity of parading her supposed captive in the presence of witnesses. That crushed any lingering feeling of compunction that I may have had. I had been resolute before; I was adamant now. I ordered the gig alongside, and in a few minutes we were standing on the deck of the ‘Scirocco,’ Conington greeting us with sardonic smiles by which my withers were unwrung. I met the derisive and compassionate gestures with which he favoured me behind Mrs. Wynne’s back in a spirit of bland self-security. ‘Wait a bit, my boy!’ thought I to myself. ‘*Rira bien qui rira le dernier!*’

‘Pray, have you two been cruising about together for long?’ Conington inquired, taking no pains to hide his insulting chuckles.

Mrs. Wynne did her best to look bashful. ‘Really, Lord Conington!’ she exclaimed with a conscious laugh. And then—‘I’m sure you won’t be so ill-natured as to tell anybody about your having seen us. It was the merest chance—I missed the friends who were to have met me here, and General Rivers took pity upon me and offered to see me to my destination. Perhaps I ought not to have consented; but I have such a dread of crowded steamers and excursion trains!’

‘Oh, that’s it, is it?’ said Conington, chuckling more than

ever. ‘Well, you may rely upon my discretion ; I never tell tales out of school. Perhaps, now that you are on board, you would like to have a look at my accommodation below. I have made one or two improvements this year which I flatter myself are a success.’

This was just what I wanted. Conington has a mania for taking blurred photographs of which he is inordinately proud, and I knew that if I could get him to exhibit the thousand and one (more or less) specimens of his skill which he always has on board with him, no victim, however impatient, would escape from his clutches under three-quarters of an hour at least. So, after we had duly admired his new bath-room and smoking-cabin, I said : ‘I suppose you’ve had the camera out this summer ?’

‘Oh, yes,’ he answered, ‘and I’ve done some rather good things, I think, only of course they are not printed yet. I wonder whether Mrs. Wynne would care to see a few records of former cruises and journeys.’

Victory ! The well-known albums were dragged down from their shelves. Mrs. Wynne was wedged in between the sofa and the table, with the open books before her; Conington, forgetful of everything except the matter immediately in hand, was bending over her and doing the explanatory showman. ‘That is Venice, from the sea. The gondolas in the foreground have wobbled about a little ; but it’s a pretty picture. Those are the Falls of Niagara—no ; the Mer de Glace, taken from the Montanvert. That appearance in the sky is owing to a slight fault in the plate. Looks like the moon, doesn’t it ? I thought I would leave it so,’ &c., &c.

I sauntered as far as the foot of the companion, with my hands in my pockets, whistling. Then I mounted a few steps to look at the barometer and rap it with my knuckles. A few more steps, taken very slowly and deliberately, brought me up on deck, where my demeanour underwent a sudden change. I was over the side and seated in my gig in the twinkling of an eye. ‘Shove off !’ I said in an agitated whisper, and in a very short space of time I was once more on board my own vessel.

A certain huntsman (it was one of the well-known Hills family, I think), being told that fox-hunting was a cruel sport, replied that he could not see in what the cruelty consisted. The hounds liked it, the horses liked it, and he firmly believed that the fox liked it too. It may very well be so. For choice, I should always

prefer pursuing to being pursued ; yet, from personal experience, I can strongly recommend running away to all who desire to make trial of a novel and intense emotion. I shall ever remember the brief period which intervened between the moment of my quitting the 'Scirocco' and that when we rounded the island of Kerrera as having been, upon the whole, the most exciting of my life. How I blessed the rugged hills which shut out Oban from us and us from Oban ! I was perfectly safe now. Out of sight and out of hail, I might have been in the other hemisphere for any chance that Mrs. Wynne had of getting me into her power again. I dare say neither she nor Conington noticed my absence before we were well on our way down the Sound of Mull, bowling along merrily with a fair wind.

When I pictured to myself what their faces would be like on finding that I and my yacht had vanished as if by enchantment, I gave way to paroxysms of ecstatic mirth. Jackson, who must of course have understood the nature of the case, was grinning from ear to ear ; the men, too, collected together in the forecastle, were bursting into intermittent guffaws. Poor fellows, why shouldn't they laugh ? It isn't every day that I can provide my crew with a really first-class practical joke to laugh at. I didn't grudge them their hilarity ; I wouldn't have grudged anybody anything at that moment. I was in such good humour with all the world that I could not harbour unkind thoughts even of Mrs. Wynne. I bore her no malice ; I had paid her out so handsomely that I could afford to forgive her, and, after such a lesson as she had received, it was scarcely likely that she would molest me any more.

The day passed pleasantly and peacefully away ; and not until we had left Jura and Islay far astern and were out upon the long Atlantic swell did I remember that I had all the poor woman's luggage on board. That recollection damped my spirits considerably. I had never intended to put her to such dreadful inconvenience as I must have done, and the more I thought of the situation the less I liked it. Obviously it was my duty to restore Mrs. Wynne's property to her with all possible despatch ; but whither was I to send it ? I knew of no address at Oban, even supposing, what was most unlikely, that she would remain another day or two in that place ; and she had not told me anything more about her destination than that she wanted to catch the train at Glasgow. All things considered, the chances, I thought, were in favour of her

having been on her way to visit her daughter, and I determined to put into Stranraer and forward her belongings thence to Cumberland, where Lady Charles's new home was situated. I did so the next day, at the same time addressing the following telegram to Stapleton : 'Have sent you four packages by express ; property of Mrs. Wynne left on board my yacht by unfortunate mistake. Don't know where she is, so am obliged to direct them to you. Hope it's all right. Am sailing to-day for Portsmouth.'

This done, I resumed my voyage in a somewhat less jubilant mood. The episode of the purloined baggage might, I felt, cause awkward complications, and it would always be difficult for me to give any satisfactory explanation of its having been on board my yacht at all. What with one thing and another, it took me very nearly a fortnight to get round to Portsmouth, where, on my arrival, I found the following letter from Charles Stapleton awaiting me :—

'Dear General Rivers,

'The boxes which you were kind enough to send from Stranraer reached this safely a day or two before Mrs. Wynne joined us. Of course she was very glad to have them again, but she had been obliged to get herself a complete new rig-out at Glasgow, which was rather a bore for her. There certainly does seem, as you say, to have been some unfortunate mistake. I don't wish to be officious, and would much rather not interfere between you and my mother-in-law in any way ; but I may as well tell you that she is very much hurt by what she calls your inexplicable behaviour. She says you left her at Oban without any reason or any warning, although it had been arranged that you were to take her to the Clyde, and that if it had not been for the kindness of Lord Conington, who insisted upon placing his yacht at her disposal, she does not know what would have become of her. Her conviction is that you went off in a fit of pique, because you didn't like her spending a long time with old Conington looking over a photograph book or something. I must say that I have some difficulty in believing this extraordinary statement, but I thought I had better let you know what she says.

'Alice is sure that it would all be set right and explained if you and her mother could meet, and she begs me to say, with her love, that she hopes you will come and stay a few days with us, if you can manage it. I need not add how glad I shall be to see you. Mrs. Wynne will be here for another month, I expect, but the

sooner you come the better, because she *will* go on talking about it to everybody, and one doesn't want outsiders to be entertained with family differences.

'Sincerely yours,

'CHARLES STAPLETON.'

This letter caused me extreme discomfort. I was unwilling to lose the friendship and esteem of the Stapletons, but I saw at once that I must chance that. As for meeting Mrs. Wynne, I would as soon have met the whole of Wombwell's menagerie loose on Salisbury Plain. I would not even answer Charles's letter, but only sent him another telegram: 'Sorry I can't come. Just off to the Mediterranean for the winter. No explanation at all necessary or desirable.'

If he had a grain of common sense he would understand that, I thought; but if he didn't understand, I couldn't help it. I kept my word and sailed for the Mediterranean as soon as ever I could make the necessary arrangements, and there I have been ever since. It was only the other day that, taking up one of those weekly papers whose mission it is to chronicle social events, I came across the subjoined astounding paragraph:—

'It is announced that a marriage will take place very shortly between Viscount Conington and Mrs. Wynne, whose daughter, Lady Charles Stapleton, was one of the beauties of last season, and who is herself considered by many people to be *filiâ pulchrior*.'

Well, I am sorry for poor Conington; but it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and I suppose I may go home now.

THE FIRST WARNING.

IN the poem of ‘The Three Warnings,’ ascribed to Mrs. Thrale, but concerning which it is ungallantly suggested, since it is ‘so inferior to her other compositions,’ that Johnson must have helped her in it, there seems to me an error or two, even if he did. The hero, Dodson—was ever such a name given to hero before?—is first presented to us as a ‘jocund bridegroom,’ who, when Death looks in upon him, very naturally observes—

‘Young as I am, ‘tis monstrous hard.
My thoughts on other matters go;
This is my wedding day, you know.’

Moved by this argument, Death promises not to call again for some time to come, and in the meantime to send ‘Three Warnings beforehand.’ He calls in Dodson’s eightieth year—a proof of moderation on the part of his grisly majesty which is not appreciated.

‘So soon returned!’ old Dodson cries.
‘So soon d’ye call it?’ Death replies;
‘Surely, my friend, you’re but in jest;
Since I was here before
‘Tis six-and-thirty years at least,
And you are now fourscore.’

So that the poetess makes the ‘jocund bridegroom’ no less than forty-four on his marriage-day—presumably his first one. This is surely not poetical justice—to the bride. Moreover, Mrs. Thrale makes another and a graver error in the character of her first warning; which she makes to be lameness. This is not in accordance with the experience of human life at all. It should have been failure of memory; and if Dodson had been half as sharp as Dodson and Fogg were, he might have pleaded it with success. When Death reminded him of his previous visit, he should have boldly said that he had no recollection of the circumstance, and insisted on a written notice and starting *de novo*. I have no doubt whatever that, except in cases of chronic rheumatism or of intoxication, one’s memory goes before one’s legs. And even while we possess it, how partial it is! The scientific writers upon this subject take little note of this, and seem to attribute its absence

in certain particulars to disease ; but, if so, there must be a good many diseased memories. For my own part, I have never been able to remember a single date, save that of the Battle of Hastings, for which a verse in Valpy's 'Chronology,'

In years one thousand and sixty-six
Since Christ in Bethlehem's manger lay,

gave me a particular clue ; and the year 1830, which has a special significance for me, as being the epoch in which (as I have been informed) I myself began to 'flourish.'

Cross-examination in a court of justice has always its terrors ; for what chance has even the most blameless life against the insinuations of a brutal and chartered slanderer ? but for me it would be destruction, since, though I remember the occurrence of things, I have not the slightest idea as to when they occurred ; not only within a week, or a month, or a year, but within a decade. Such a question as 'Now, on your oath, sir, was it not in May 1870 that you made the first attempt to poison your grandmother?' would paralyse me at once. I should not only not know whether it was in May or March, but should be unable to indicate the date within ten years. The circumstance itself would no doubt recur to me on having my mental elbow thus brutally jogged, but as to when it took place, I should be powerless to help even my own counsel. If the judge insisted, he would have to take his choice between 1066 and 1830, and fix the month as he liked. There must be an immense number of people in the same unhappy position as myself in this respect, and I can't imagine what they do under such circumstances.

In a recent trial, some poor wretch subjected to this torture, which is really very similar to the old 'pressing to death,' produced in despair a diary. It was of course at once suggested that it was forged. Perhaps it was ; but who can blame him ? I can *imagine* dates myself, though I can never remember them. On the other hand, there are heaps of people who seem to remember nothing *but* dates. They forget the point of their stories altogether, but have all the chronological details at their fingers' ends, or thereabouts. 'It was in the autumn of 1846,' they begin, 'and rather late in the autumn : yes, it was in October, and severe weather for the time of year. 1847, as you no doubt remember (they turn to me for corroboration ; I gasp and nod), was particularly mild in its autumn,' &c. &c.

Good heavens! In what pigeon-holes in their minds do they keep such a fact as that, and why do they keep it? It is this sort of memory which, like a bad shilling, never leaves its possessor. Age cannot impair it, nor custom stale its infinite inutility. On the other hand, their memory upon other matters leaves them, as it leaves me, long before their legs. I have a relative who has so many nephews and nieces that she can't count them, and makes no effort to do so, but with whom the recollection of 1846 as distinguished from 1847 with its mild autumn is quite distinct. If an expectant juvenile comes to see her, he is welcomed cordially: 'My darling child, how well you are looking, and how good it is of you to come and see your old auntie!' Then after the cake and wine have been partaken of, and the two half-crowns in a piece of silver paper duly pocketed, she inquires with tender curiosity, 'And now, my dear, *who* are you?' I have not got to that stage yet myself, but that is what I am coming to.

People don't lose their memory all of a sudden, of course. The commencement of its failure is with the small cards of the plain suits: nobody (but your partner) thinks much of that; but when it comes to the large cards and the trumps, you had better sit out and content yourself with watching the play. Your own part in the game of whist (and of life) is over. Royal families (because perhaps in their case not to know folks is a slight, and therefore the art is worth cultivating) are said to have 'an extraordinary memory for faces.' I yield to no crowned head in Europe in this particular; I recognise with ease, but I cannot identify. A man's face, once seen, becomes familiar to me, but not necessarily welcome; I don't know whose it is. It may be my Lord Thingamy whom I was so gratified by meeting at What-d'ye-call-um's the other night, and who conversed so affably upon the weather; or it may be the young man who irons my hats at Lincoln and Bennett's; or it may be one of the club waiters out for a holiday. Or, again, I may connect a man's face with his individuality; know him for my friend or neighbour perfectly well; but his name escapes me. When one's friend asks to be introduced to another hitherto a stranger to him, and you can't do it for the life of you, on account of this temporary oblivion, it is very inconvenient. There have been occasions when I have forgotten them both; it is then necessary to put on an appearance of excessive *bonhomie*, clap them each on the back, and exclaim, 'You two know one another by name, of course;' and if they don't, it's unfortunate,

but not *my* fault. I can remember good stories; but, unless the persons of whom they are narrated are necessary to the jest, they are very apt to escape me.

There was one, with more humour than grace in it, told of a certain money-lender of the last generation. Finding myself after dinner next to a man very obnoxious to me, but whom, for my host's sake, I wished to treat civilly, I favoured him with this very anecdote; it was better, under these circumstances, than conversation, and, dull as he was, I felt it could not fail to tickle him. The effect was unmistakable, but it did not take the shape I expected. He grew graver and graver; his face became a bluish purple, and his eyes slowly pushed themselves out of his head. Then suddenly it flashed across me that the hero of this very funny, but not complimentary narrative, was his own father. 'Well,' he said in an awful voice, as I stopped short; 'what then?'

My brow was bedewed with horror, and I seemed to see sparks. 'My very dear sir,' I said, 'I am ashamed to say that I have drunk a little too much wine. I have clean forgotten how the story ended!' But I have not forgotten how near I was to telling it, nor shall I ever forget it.

That was an example of memory coming to the rescue indeed; but sometimes it arrives inopportunely. An old acquaintance of mine who lived in the days when George the Third was king, and had not a little to do with him, told me the following story. In those good old days a title of nobility was really worth something, and fetched a good round sum. My friend was the youthful assistant of a well-known gentleman, Major D., who dealt in such things; and an excellent living he made by them. He was 'attached to the person of His Majesty' (not without reason), and took advantage of his position to recommend his friends (and clients) to 'the fountain of honour,' who was far from being in good condition. He had still his wits about him, but not, like his lords, 'in waiting.' Sometimes he would sign anything in the most obliging manner, and sometimes refuse to stir a finger, and make the most embarrassing inquiries. The Major's business, therefore, though very lucrative when all things went right, was a speculative one, and exposed to considerable risks. One day there was a baronetcy 'on,' for which a celebrated maker of musical instruments had undertaken to pay handsomely, and the necessary parchment, duly drawn out, was laid before the king.

His royal eye, wandering aimlessly down the page, suddenly lit upon the name of the candidate for greatness—some Erard or Broadwood of that time—and it evoked a flash of memory. ‘ You’re sure there’s no piano in it ? ’ he exclaimed suddenly. His Majesty, who was a great stickler for birth, and had a corresponding contempt for those who made their money by trade, was not to be trifled with in such a matter ; and as there were a great many pianos in it, the two confederates had to hurriedly murmur, ‘ We will make inquiries, sire,’ and roll up the patent. That little gleam of royal recollection cost the Major 5,000*l.*, his assistant, my informant, his fee, and the musical gentleman his baronetey.

Judging from my own case, since some unlooked-for return of this departing attribute always delights my soul, the king himself must have been pleased. I can imagine him saying, ‘ By jingo ! I remembered *that*, though ; ’ and reflecting that he was not so very old after all. Unhappily there is little comfort to be drawn from such occasional resuscitations. It is only that ‘ the shadow feared of man ’ has had his attention withdrawn from us for the moment (probably to some more advanced case), and forgets to beckon with that inexorable finger. It is no use to fight against the ebbing wave ; yet how some people do fight !

I was once dining with a friend who had one other guest, whom I will call B. This gentleman, after dinner, became extraordinarily eloquent upon the agreeable qualities of a certain Mr. C., who, according to his account, had been imported from Cornwall to London solely for his conversational qualities. ‘ His stories,’ he said, ‘ are simply inimitable.’

‘ I suppose they are Cornish stories,’ observed our host, who, as a denizen of Pall Mall, did not much believe, perhaps, in provincial celebrities.

‘ Not at all,’ replied B. indignantly ; ‘ they are English stories.’ This statement, which suggested that we had thought the stories were in old Cornish—an extinct dialect—tickled me immensely ; but, being a very well behaved individual, I devoted myself to the biscuits and kept my eyes on the table.

‘ And have you heard any of these admirable narratives ? ’ inquired our host.

‘ Yes ; lots.’ It struck me that the word ‘ lots’ sounded suspiciously like ‘ lotsh ; ’ but yet it was impossible to imagine B. intoxicated : he not only looked as sober as a judge, but he *was*

a judge (though, it is true, only a colonial one), and, though of heavy build and dignified movement, he seemed the last sort of person to be overtaken by liquor.

I think our host noticed that something was amiss, for he said, ‘Won’t you take any more wine?’ and half rose from his chair as if to adjourn to the smoking-room. ‘Let me drink this first,’ said B. with judicial gravity, ‘before we think of any more. That was a speech,’ he added with a confidential smile, ‘that was made by the old dean of something or another to his host when he wanted to get him away to the ladies.’ Our host hastened to explain that he had no such end in view; nor indeed was it possible, since we were dining at a club, which does not admit the other sex; and, since he found himself in for it, returned, rather wickedly, as I thought, to the Cornishman and his stories.

‘Perhaps, my dear B., you will be so good as to tell us one.’

‘By all means; I will. It is not the best of them perhaps; but it will give you an idea of his style.’ Then he began. I say he began; but in point of fact he never left off beginning. There was an innkeeper, and a smuggler, and a miner, and the first hint of a wreck, but they were mere skeletons. The Cornish gentleman’s style, if it *was* his style, was certainly tedious. It was like drawing an immense map of an unknown country for our instruction, without so much as a post town in it. I did not dare look up from my plate. I felt myself on the verge of an apoplectic fit through suppressed laughter, and I knew that my host was suffering the same inconvenience; he was much fatter, and of necessity touched the table, which gently shook in sympathy with his inward agonies. Suddenly the judge ceased in the middle of a sentence, and then, as ill luck would have it, my host’s foot (he was stretching his legs for a momentary relief to the mental tension) touched my own. Then we both burst out into inextinguishable mirth. For my part I could not have avoided it had B. been the Pope. What added to my hilarity was the desperate efforts of our host to apologise, which, themselves interrupted by spasms of laughter on his own part, were received by B. with imperturbable gravity. He did not give one the impression of being annoyed at all, but merely as biding his time for some full and complete explanation. At last his opportunity arrived. ‘I am aware,’ he said, ‘my good friends, that I have somehow forgotten the point of what I give you my honour is a most interesting story, but *give me one more chance.*’

Anything more pathetic I never heard. It reduced our mirth to sober limits at once, and then he began again. As I live by bread (and little else) the innkeeper, the smuggler, the miner, and the first hint of the wreck that never was to come off, were all planned out again, and he came to a full stop precisely and exactly at the same moment as before. I don't know what powers of narration the Cornish gentleman really did possess, but I am quite certain that no 'twice-told tale' of his or any other person ever evoked such rapturous delight in his hearers as that story twice begun and never finished. The judge is knighted and sitting thousands of miles away presiding over his dusky court; but I seem to see him now, imperturbable, bland, and modestly pleading, 'Give me one more chance.' He had confidence in his memory, though it was misplaced.

I remember an equally droll example of a gentleman who knew himself better. His name was O'Halleron, the greatest talker I ever knew, and with an earnestness and vigour in his tones which, unless you knew him, you would have thought must needs be accompanied by truth. Our host had started some subject on which the other at once became amazingly eloquent. It reminded him, he said, of an anecdote that had occurred to him in Paris (with ever so many *r's*) and which was calculated to make us die of laughing; yet after a burst of about twenty minutes he seemed just as far off the anecdote as when he began. Of course I was all attention and politeness—a circumstance which, though I hope not uncommon, appeared to tickle my host extremely.

'You amuse me immensely,' he said, cutting off the other's flow of talk at the very main, as it were, by addressing me with grave directness. 'You don't know my friend here, or you would not be in such a creditable state of expectation. O'Halleron begins all right, you know—his intentions are honourable enough—but after the first few minutes he altogether forgets what it was he purposed to talk about. At this very moment he has not the very faintest idea where he started from, or where he is going to.'

As there was an awkward pause, during which the conversationalist turned exceedingly red, I hastened to interpose.

'I am quite sure,' I said, with a courteous air, 'that Mr. O'Halleron knows perfectly well what anecdote he was about to tell us.'

'Begad, I don't, though,' said O'Halleron; 'I've forgotten all about it.'

He was, it seemed, perfectly aware of the loss of his memory, and had learnt, not indeed to do without it, but to use some substitute of imagination or fancy, just as, when one has but one leg, one gets a thing of cork and wires, instead of flesh and blood, to supply its place.

In the scientific treatises on the failure of memory, some very curious specific examples are given. Thus one gentleman could never retain any conception of words beginning with the letter D (such as his debts for instance); while with another the figure 5 had utterly lost its significance.¹ This latter catastrophe would be serious to a whist player, since he would never know when he had won a game; but otherwise the blank seems endurable. What would be much more curious would be the losing sight of number one, which, however, up to our last moments (and indeed in those especially) is never forgotten.

Of course there are exceptions as regards this first hint of mental decay. It is even stoutly asserted by some persons that the loss of memory arises merely from disuse. It is only, they argue, in youth, in most cases, that we attempt to learn things ‘by heart’ at all, while, when we grow old, we delegate the duty of remembrance to others. If we kept it up, the faculty would not desert us. A corroboration of this pleasant theory is found in Mr. Samuel Brandram, who, though not apparently in his *première jeunesse*, exhibits a stupendousness of recollection infinitely more marvellous, because accompanied by the acutest perception, than that of the most Calculating Boy. One of my favourite nightmares—I have a whole stud of them—is to dream that I am standing before a distinguished audience, including Her Majesty and the Royal Family, who are awaiting a reading from Shakespeare without book; the indispensable glass of water is on the table with which I just moisten my lips, and then when I attempt to open them I find it has been a draught of Lethe. Every word of what I came to say has fled from my mind. I gasp and tremble; everybody becomes excited and impatient: in vain I attempt to conciliate them by offering to state accurately and offhand the date of the Battle of Hastings. There is a sort of O. P. riot, the distinguished audience rise *en masse*, tear up the benches, and make for me in the order of precedence; I wake in a paroxysm of terror, and—instantly forget all about it.

¹ Hence, perhaps, the origin of the term ‘spoilt fives,’ the meaning of which I could never understand.

MY TIGER WATCH.



I AM not a 'practised' writer, but I can promise one thing, that the account I am going to give of the night I spent in the jungle at Gunnapoorum in the early part of last May shall not be strictly false, as Indian stories are usually supposed to be, but shall be as true as my best efforts and memory can make it.

I had been in India six months and had shot four tigers at the time I found myself encamped near the village of Gunnapoorum, about

four miles from the particular part of the jungle in which the resident shikari reported tigers, and my head man Barlao (Hindustani for Bear), after an exploring round with him, came to the conclusion that there were no fewer than three full-grown beasts, namely tiger, tigress, and cub, infesting the forest. Tracks there certainly were of one tigress—a deep oval footprint, betokening a heavy female, and of one male, a square—but whether the old gentleman were or were not still in residence was doubtful. Barlao thought yes; I thought no, and I was supported in my opinion by my younger shikari, Seib, and by the villagers. I must state that what gave rise to the question was the difficulty of judging from prints or 'pughs' in the extremely soft deep sand, as in this even the velvet-footed tiger sinks deeply at every step, without leaving a clear-cut impression, the marks varying so much in size with the nature of the sand as to require a most practised tracker to decide whether they had been made by a young or old animal, or by both. There could be no doubt about the mother and son, but the wise men of the East could not agree about the presence of the Paterfamilias.

Well, it was no use beating that jungle, for the forest was so dense down to the very brink of the broad river-bed which wound through it that no beaters would have been of the slightest use; so it was a case of a night-watch and making my bag by moonlight.

Luckily there was moonlight, a bright full moon, or I should have been reduced to a hole in the ground, so as to have been on a level with my prey, and see his outline against the sky-line; and a platform is pleasanter every way than a hole in the ground. Accordingly the platform was got ready during the day, and was a rudely constructed enough affair apparently, though in reality so artfully and scientifically designed that not even Pussy could have distinguished it from the surrounding mass of foliage, unless her attention had been attracted by an unwary movement; and so it admirably served its purpose of concealing me from the sharp eyes of the most suspicious brute in the world. Catch old Stripes come near my bullock if he thought 'a shooting-iron' was anywhere about! So I was up about ten feet from the ground, till he should have got to work on the remains of the buffalo, and then it would be my turn to get to work on him.

It was late in the afternoon before all our arrangements were perfect, and tying up a succulent young heifer by the foreleg a few yards out in the river-bed, we kicked the sand over our foot-marks and vanished from the spot for the night, and returned to camp, fervently hoping that some one or other of the tiger family would appreciate the supper we had prepared with so much pains.

At nine o'clock the next morning we anxiously returned and examined the spot. The river-bed was dry at this time of the year, except here and there where a pool or two of water still lay, and these were well trodden down by game of many kinds. These, of course, had not drunk together, nor even at the same pool. Of heavy game we saw fresh tracks of bear, panther, and, what delighted us more than all, the 'pughs' of the tigress and cub. Of smaller game we found traces of pig, cheetul, the latter a graceful deer, and the tiny jungle-sheep—these had all taken their evening draught at one pool, and to it a very small panther had also made his way, after they had retreated, fortunately for them. Two bears had enjoyed some cool water from a pool under a large rock, while the tigers had both favoured the upper and larger pool, and had evidently luxuriated there, rolling and stretching themselves in the cool sand for some moments before they noticed our dainty provision for their supper.

Evidence was clear, as if written in a book or beheld with the eye, of what a tragedy had taken place the night before in that lonely forest.

The tigers had been drinking and amusing themselves, when all at once they had caught sight of the unfortunate buffalo, and at that moment that buffalo's days, not to say minutes, had been numbered.

They had gone for him. They had raced over the intervening ninety yards at full speed, for the light sand had spurned from their feet as they had galloped, and then there had been one simultaneous bound, for the sand was not disturbed, and the footprints ceased about eighteen or nineteen feet from the buffalo, with deeply indented marks where they had driven their feet in for the last tremendous spring, no more being visible until they reappeared round the carcase.

A hunter is never satisfied. I would have willingly resigned my two next tigers to have seen with my own eyes those two terrible leaps in the moonlight, and to have heard the woods echo with those two deep short roars that must have rung through them the night before.

As is very often the case, but little of the 'kill' had been eaten, so there was every prospect of my having a successful vigil during the night, with the undevoured portion as a bait. I ought to obtain a good chance from my platform, as, from whatever direction the brutes came, they would be clear of overhanging branches when they approached the remains of buffalo, which, having been fastened by the leg to a stump, had not been dragged away.

I was not to be alone on the watch, as Seib, an awfully smart young fellow, was anxious to see the sport ; and shikarries don't care a straw for the devils of the jungle, which are such a terror to the ordinary villager that, as a rule, except in large parties, no native will face after dark the supernatural mysterious haunts of the tiger, infested as they are with gruesome, unexplained, and unearthly noises. These are attributed to devils, and every now and then in the depths of the forest you come across a devil-tree, hung with yellow flowers, daubed with red paint and whitewash, while in front is generally a small stone altar with a few trident or spear heads planted in the ground round it. No native would go alone near one of these devil-trees at night to save his life.

Seib, however, was above all such frivolities, and, full of anticipations of a bag, we set off shortly before sunset, each of us

carrying a woollen blanket, which, being spread over the branches of our 'machan' or platform, minimised the chance of our causing any accidental noise in the slight movements I might be obliged to make while aiming.

For tigers I always used a five hundred Express, built by Joseph Lang, and good old Joseph has never failed me yet.

I had often suffered from thirst during a long night-watch, as the suppressed excitement at moments when your very breathing seems audible parches the mouth dreadfully, so I always provided myself with a gourd of good water, wrapped round with wet straw, which keeps it cool. On our arrival at the 'machan,' everything was as we had left it in the morning, and but a few moments sufficed for us to establish ourselves comfortably in our ambush. Then came the sound of the 'tom-tom' from the distant village announcing sunset, and that was our last tie to humanity for the night.

The darkness came on sharp—it never takes long over that in India—and the remains of the buffalo showed conspicuously in the bright yellow sand in front of us.

It was a lovely spot. I see it now. There was the long course of the river stretching away to the left and right, like a golden road cut through the glorious depths of the dense, grand, lonely forest, lit up by the bright clear light of the moon, which rose about an hour after sunset, one side in blackest shadow of the gigantic trees which hung over its very edge, and here and there a grim cape vividly standing out where a monster had overbalanced, torn up his roots in the soft sand, and fallen; while far in the distance peeped forth the ruddy glow of a smouldering trunk, denoting where the charcoal-burners had been during the day.

But I said I could not write, and neither can I; so if you will just try and think of the place, I will get on to the tiger.

For some time we had nothing to do but keep quiet, watch this beautiful scene, and listen to the jungle-cocks chuckling and calling to each other, the rustle of the lizards creeping in and out of the dry twigs and grass, and the hum, and whistle, and whirr of the swarming insect-life. These are the sounds one always hears in an Indian forest at night, but there are many others which seem to steal unconsciously on the senses, without being noticed, the charm of which must be personally experienced, since no words can express it.

A slight breeze stirred through the trees at intervals, and the

falling of a dead branch, or the creaking of a sapling, was the only louder sound which broke the stillness; for all beasts, except bears, have such excellent reasons for moving silently, that a foot-fall is very seldom heard, and they take precious good care not to make any noise by snapping of twigs or disturbing of the foliage, which might either betray their presence to enemies or scare their quarry.

In the hush of expectancy we had sat there some two hours, straining our eyes to pierce the gloom of the jungle opposite, and our ears to catch the least warning sound of the approach of our expectant visitor or visitors, and wondering whether, or how soon, and from what quarter, *he* or *she* or *they* would appear, when there came three or four times the short, sharp clear coughing bark of a spotted buck about half a mile down the river to our right. How anxiously we waited to see if those signals were answered! Had they been so, the buck might merely have been calling to another of its own species; but no, they were not answered, and not repeated more than two or three times, each time being fainter and fainter. It was not a call, it was a warning cry; something had disturbed that cheetul; it might be anything; but as Seib and I exchanged glances, we knew that it might also be that the breeze in that part of the forest bore the taint of a—tiger.

How long or how short a time after this it might have been before anything happened, I cannot say; it seemed an age, it may have been but a few minutes. It seemed all silent enough as Seib and I sat there, but by-and-by we found it getting—silenter. The chipper of the jungle-cocks died away, one little sound after another ceased, there was not a breath stirring; even the hum of the insects seemed—but of course it was not so—to get fainter; even they seemed—but of course they didn't—to know something was going to happen.

About forty yards down the river a small bird fluttered away, with an angry chirp. A pause; and then I caught the slightest sound in the world—it was barely audible, the whistle of a dead leaf fluttering to the ground would have made more noise, but it was unmistakably *it*—the firm stealthy tread of a tiger. Only one footfall, but we both had been expecting it too intently for either to miss it. Seib and I looked at each other. The sound was close by; the beast was within a few yards of us; and we knew the brute was listening as hard as we for the least sound—

the crack of a twig, a gust of wind from us to our right, and all would have been lost ; but, no ; we were in luck. A few minutes, and my companion touched my knee, his other hand was pressed to his open mouth, his whole face gleamed with excitement, as out from the gloom, about twenty yards off, down the river to our right, glided forth the vilest-looking tigress I have ever seen ; she halted about five yards from the banks, and looked back over her shoulder, then gazed intently at the buffalo, and, apparently satisfied, walked swiftly up to it. There was an indescribably hideous beauty about her, which can be but faintly expressed by the word tigress. Involuntarily I began to think of the witch of Endor—in moments of extraordinary excitement one does have extraordinary thoughts—and, as she passed in front of us, her long, lank, soft, flexible outline showing every motion in the still moonlight, she looked the very incarnation of malice.

Usually a tiger is very qualmish, and usually, ere he will fairly begin to gorge or kill, looks perpetually over his shoulder as he creeps along, stops, listens, glaring about in every direction with his great fierce eyes, and will, even after beginning, often take a survey round or make a considerable circuit ere he returns to the spot and falls to in earnest. More than once I had had to wait for this second and real first course to begin before I was satisfied with my chance ; for it is only a chance in night shooting at the best, and I never but once found myself at fault in so doing, of which more anon, but I am satisfied I did right to wait even that time, nevertheless. The old girl in front of me, however, was an ‘unsophisticated creature,’ and as no one had shot in this jungle before—as far as I could learn, at least—there was some excuse for her being less wary than others of her species who live in the more easily reached jungles in India. There she was, lying on her chest, within a few inches of the ‘kill,’ while my rifle was lying ready across my knees, but the moment had not yet arrived for me to use it. Anxiously I watched her through my field-glasses ; if I could only bag her, how jolly it would be ! She was awfully old and skinny, lean, anxious and haggard looking, with wrinkled lines all down her cheeks ; but she was cheerful enough under present influences, and a soft purring noise soon gave intimation that everything was entirely to madam’s satisfaction, and that she intended to make a good ‘square meal,’ without troubling her head about anybody, and would be obliged by having no interruptions.

This watching a wild beast following its own inclinations, totally unconscious of the presence of a human enemy, constitutes one of the greatest attractions of the jungle, and for this reason I generally watched alone; willingly would I now have put off firing longer than was necessary, but I was mortally afraid of some accident sending off the tigress, as the chances of this were of course doubled by having my young shikarri with me; so the moment I



heard the bones crunch, I shouldered my rifle silently, and aimed point-blank for the shoulder.

It is impossible to see the fore sight of your rifle at night, whatever expedients you may adopt, such as luminous paint, a ball of cotton wool, &c., so you have to aim point-blank as best you can. A second sufficed to get a true line, and the next instant the merry music of the Express rang out clear and sharp.

The smoke hung in front of me, preventing my seeing the result, and I had then to wait in the keenest anxiety for the rush through the bushes, which it was fifty to one would be the next sound heard, if the tigress had been missed, or only wounded, no matter how severely. However, the next moment freed me from anxiety, as Seib saw, before the smoke floated in front of him, that my shot had taken effect, and that the tigress had sunk on her side. Almost at once the smoke cleared, and I need scarcely say that I looked anxiously at the spot, but I was horrified to see nothing; for it was several moments before I could distinguish her yellow skin from the sand, now that her form cast no shadow. However, Seib, whose sharp eyesight soon spotted her white belly, pointed her out, and I instantly covered her with my second barrel, in case she should revive and rush off, as tigers often do after they have recovered from the first shock of a mortal wound. But this was unnecessary; she never stirred again, for, as we afterwards found, the bullet had broken her neck.

Need I say how pleased I was at the result of that lucky shot, or describe the delight which took the place of excitement in Seib's face—such a contrast to the disgust it would have expressed if I had missed? Had the brute even been severely wounded, the tracking next day would have been more than usually hazardous, owing to the height and density of the underwood in the jungle. However, all had been right this time and no mistake. There she lay on her side, and mightily did Seib rejoice.

So we had 'pocketed' the tigress, and as we smoked together, my companion and I eagerly discussed our prospects of getting the cub and even the old tiger which Barläo had maintained existed in the vicinity. The thing was, would the cub come this evening? As I said before, we did not agree with Barläo, so the old tiger did not enter into our calculations; but the question was, how about the cub? Was there a chance of him? We did not think we had a chance, and imagined that nothing would induce that wily rogue to draw near to the grisly spot where his mother so involuntarily reclined; and as, however joyous a spectacle she might be to us, stretched out there full length in the gleaming moonshine, he could not be expected to see it in the same light, we made up our minds that our night's task was done, and that, having finished our smoke, we could draw our blankets round us and snooze till break of day.

But no, better luck was in store; the smoke was done; Seib

had curled himself up, and I was about to follow his example, when we heard a sound never to be forgotten when once heard—the ‘wooaugh-augh’ of a tiger’s call, but pitched in a whining, plaintive, interrogative tone. It came from the brushwood not fifty yards off, and, alert in a moment, we waited, hoping against hope. Seib remained motionless as a stone, wrapped up in his rug, for, like all natives on going to sleep, he had drawn the blanket up over his head; he knew better than to stir at so critical a moment, and had to remain lying down; but I fortunately was still sitting up; my rifle, too, was in position, as I had left it on my knees when I had put in a fresh cartridge, so I was all right for the next move on the board. There could be no doubt about it; there the cub was, within a stone’s throw. It was most unlikely, at least we should have said previously that it was most unlikely, that a tiger would approach the dead body of one of its own species under the circumstances; and the chances, every shikari would have agreed, were at least twenty to one that as soon as he saw—and doesn’t he *see*? he is not like a bear or an elephant; he sees *everything*—that, as soon as he saw the corpse, he would vanish without further ado, and start a household on his own hook.

So we should all have said, but those two calls were affectionate ones, not suspicious nor angry. Then, the jungle had never been shot before, as I said earlier; and the tigress had fallen in a natural position on her side, as we often see large dogs or cats lie in the sun with their legs straight out; and above all she had died without a sound; we had also been very cautious in talking and in keeping our hands round the glowing part of our tobacco, to prevent its being seen, as, though we expected nothing, a hunter depends upon chances for sport—so we yet hoped.

There was a dead silence for about five minutes, and the next sound was an impatient ‘Woogh!’ as if all the wind in the brute’s body had been driven forcibly through its open jaws, and then—I began to despair. But our star was still in the ascendant, and a few seconds after, this is what that cub did. Appearing about ten yards lower down the river than his mother had done when she first broke cover, he proceeded to walk with a careless unconcerned step towards the spot where she lay. What he could have made of the shot which killed her I cannot imagine, unless he took it for thunder, there having been one or two storms in this jungle shortly before.

He merely glanced at the tigress—perhaps her easy position misled him into the belief that she slumbered—and having passed her by, as unworthy of notice, he now gave his full attention to the buffalo, smelling him cautiously.

It was no time for hesitation, nor watching him with glasses. Any moment might bring the conviction of its being no sleep which had overpowered her, so I aimed as quickly as possible, and blazed.



Seib was up in an instant; but again we had to await the dispersion of the smoke.

It was not long clearing away, and there lay the new-comer, a pace or two behind the other! Only once I saw him raise his head, when I very nearly fired, but expecting him momentarily to be up and bounding away, I paused, in the hope of obtaining a more certain shot. There was no need for it. The head sank down again; it had been the poor cub's final effort.

Seib's cry of joy assured me that there could be no doubt of my good luck.

'Dead ! Dead ! Two tigers with two bullets, master sahib ; very great sahib ; very good shikarri,' said he, as he made a low salaam.

I longed to be down examining the spoil, but my companion held me impressively back, urging a safety shot to make doubly sure.

Accordingly I fired once more, though I was sorry for it afterwards, as I found my first bullet had torn the beast's heart in



such a way that it could never have stood again, and my second shot, being a bad one in the stomach, had merely made an unnecessary hole in the skin.

Still, the more prudent shikarri objected to my going within reach of either of the tigers, and I knew him to be right ; but I longed to be down examining the spoil, as I said before, touching them, handling them, finding out how they had been hit, &c. ; so I waited till my companion should nap off, for there would be no more sleep for *me* that night, and then I meant to be down beside the slain animals.

Meantime I watched the two beauties lying there side by side. What a size they looked, with their limbs stretched out, and the cub's tail curling gracefully over his back, their huge carcasses relaxed, and their great heads pillow'd on the sand!

My good fortune seemed scarcely credible, and as soon as the shikarri fairly slumbered, down I slipped from the platform.

It was all right; there was no fear of a slap in the face; those mighty paws would never stir a joint again.

All round us was still as death. It was past midnight, and the weird solemnity of the scene made it desperately exciting and 'kind of awful.'

I did not mind it, but I wished I could be doing something more. There was nothing now to be done, but to pat, and stroke, and look at the two great furred bodies; and so there I stood, patting, and stroking, and looking.

I was recalled to myself by a very slight movement in the edge of the opposite forest, and remembering what old Barläo had said about a third tiger, and knowing that if there really were one, he would probably be not far off, I thought it advisable to return to the 'machan' while all was well; but feeling restless and pretty confident that even if there were another Stripes he would not show himself that night, I woke up Seib, and we returned to the village about two o'clock in the morning, and sent a couple of bullock carts for the trophies. They arrived soon after dawn, and proved to be a fine pair; the cub, being a male, measured two inches more than the tigress, although she was a remarkably long one.

Old Barläo was as pleased as I was at our success, and accompanied me back to the 'machan' the next morning. After a careful examination of the opposite bank, he found the fresh marks of a third tiger, and triumphantly pointed them out. They were close to the spot where I had heard a movement on the previous night, while examining the tigress and cub; so I may have unconsciously had an escape.

I watched the following night with Seib, in the hope of his putting in an appearance, but we saw nothing of him, though we found by his tracks that the wily old scamp had had his evening drink at a pool a long way down the river.

Barläo had made me promise I would give him three chances, so for the third time I ascended the 'machan,' and at about eleven o'clock sure enough he came, walking under the shadow of the

opposite bank, whence he emerged when exactly opposite the bait, which on this occasion was a live buffalo, and a queer time that buffalo had of it. I don't think he will want to go through his experiences again. The tiger approached, looked at him, stared at him, grinned at him. The buffalo, tied up as he was by the leg, turned himself round and round, faced his ghastly visitor, and returned the stare idiotically ; and thus the two continued for some moments. It was the most weird and at the same time the most ludicrous sight it has ever been my lot to witness. The horror of it was greatly increased by the deathly silence, neither beast making the slightest sound, though, on first catching sight of the tiger, the buffalo had emitted a few melancholy croaks.

I waited in vain for my shot ; he would not expose his shoulder, and he would not demolish his friend. After a pensive survey, lasting perhaps a minute and a half, he quietly turned away and pursued his blameless path at a walk, looking from time to time with a rueful grin over his shoulder at an acquaintance with whom he so reluctantly parted. Then, as soon as he got near the edge of the forest opposite, he broke into a trot, and disappeared from our view, though not to that of the buffalo, who followed the retreating form with his eyes long after it had become lost to us in the shadow.

That was the last I ever saw of that tiger, though I sat up two other nights on the chance of his return ; and, as usual when one loses a tiger, he appeared the biggest I had ever come across.

For some time after his retreat we confidently expected a return, but probably he did not even remain in the neighbourhood, as the philosophical buffalo presently lay down to rest.

Finding no fresh tiger 'pughs,' I changed my quarters after a day or two for other hunting grounds, and with good luck, though I did not again have the fortune to kill two tigers in one night.

Their skins and heads, together with those of eight others, I brought to England a few weeks ago.

KING PEPIN AND SWEET CLIVE.



PON arriving at the middle of the Close the Dean stopped. He had been walking briskly, his chin from very custom a little tilted, but his eyes beaming with condescension and general good-will, while an indulgent smile playing about the lower part of his face relieved for the time its massive character. His walking-stick was swinging to and fro in a loose grasp, his feet trod the pavement of the precincts with the step of an owner, he felt the warmth of the sun, the balminess of the spring air dimly, and somewhere at the back of his mind he was conscious of a vacant bishopric, and of his being the husband of one wife. In fine, he presented the appearance of a contented, placid, unruffled dignitary, until he reached the middle of the Close.

But there, alas! the ferule of his stick came to the ground with a mighty thud; the sweetness and light faded from his eyes as they rested upon Mr. Swainson's plot; the condescension and good-will became conspicuous only by their absence. The Dean was undisguisedly angry; he disliked opposition as much as lesser men, and met with it more rarely. For Bicester is old-fashioned, and loves the Church and State, but especially the former, and looks up to principalities and powers, and even now execrates the memory of a recreant Bicestrian, otherwise reputable, on account of a terrible mistake he made. It was at a public dinner. 'I remember,' said this misguided man, 'going in my young days to the old and beautiful

cathedral of this city. (Great applause.) I was only a child then, and my head hardly reached above the top of the seat, but I remember I thought the Dean the greatest of living men. (Whirlwinds of applause.) Well (smiling) perhaps I don't think quite that now.' (Dead silence.) And so dull at bottom may even a man be whose name is not unknown in half the capitals of Europe, that this degenerate fellow never could guess why the friends of his youth from that moment turned their backs upon him.

Such is the faith of Bicester, but even in Bicester there are heretics. To say that the Dean rarely met with opposition, is to say that he rarely met with Mr. Swainson, and that he seldom saw Mr. Swainson's plot. As a rule, when he crossed the Close he averted his eyes by a happy impulse of custom, for he did not like Mr. Swainson, and as for the latter's plot, it was *anathema maranatha* to him. The Dean was tall, Mr. Swainson was taller; the Dean was stubborn, Mr. Swainson was obstinate; so there arose between them the antagonism that is born of similarity. On the other hand the Dean was stout and Mr. Swainson a scarecrow; the Dean was comely and clerical, but not over-rich, Mr. Swainson was pallid, lantern-jawed, wealthy, and a lawyer, and hence the dislike born of difference. Moreover, years ago Mr. Swainson had been Mayor of Bicester, when there was a little dispute between the Chapter and the Bishop, and he showed so much energy upon the one side as to earn the nickname of the 'Mayor of the Palace.' Finally Mr. Swainson delighted in opposition as a cat in milk, and cared to have a good reason for his antagonism no more than puss in the dairy about a sixty years' title to the cream-pan.

But a sixty years' title to his plot was the very thing which Mr. Swainson did claim to have. Exactly opposite his house—his father's and grandfather's house, too—in which, said his enemies, they had lived and grown fat upon cathedral patronage, lay this debateable land. His front windows commanded it, and on such a morning as this he loved to stand upon his doorstep and gaze at it with the air of a dog watching the spot where his bone is buried. But if Mr. Swainson was right, that was just what was not buried there; there were no bones there. True, the smoothly shorn surface of the little patch was divided from the green turf around the cathedral only by a slight iron railing, but, said Mr. Swainson, ponderously seizing upon his opponent's

weapon and using it with telling effect, it was of another sort altogether: of a very different nature indeed. It had never been consecrated, and close as it was to the sacred pile, being in fact separated from it on two sides but by a yard of sunk fence, it did not belong to it, it was not of it, quoth he; it was private property, the property of Erasmus John Swainson, and the appanage of his substantial red-brick house just across the Close.

And no one could refute him, though several tried their best, to his huge delight. It cannot now be exactly computed by how many years the discovery of his rights prolonged his life—not certainly by some. His liver demanded activity, namely a quarrel, and what a coil this was! If he had been given the choice of opponents, he would probably have preferred the Dean and Chapter, they were so substantial, wealthy, and all but formidable. And such a thorn in the side of those comfortable personages as these rights of his were like to be he could hardly have imagined in his most sanguine dreams, or hoped for in his happiest moments.

It was great fun stating his claim, flouting it in their faces, displaying it through the city, brandishing it in season and out of season; but when it came to making a hole in the smooth turf hitherto so sacred, and setting up an unsightly post, and affixing to it a board with 'Trespassers will be prosecuted. E. J. Swainson,' the fun became furious. So did the Dean, so did the Chapter, so did every sidesman and verger. Bicester was torn in pieces by the contending parties, but Mr. Swainson was firm. The only concession that could be wrung from him was the removal of the obnoxious board. Instead of it he placed a neat iron railing round his property, enclosing just thirty feet by fifteen. Such was the *status in quo* on this morning, and with it the Dean had for some time been obliged to rest content.

And yet, sooth to say, the greatest pleasure of the very reverend gentleman's life was gone with this accession to the roundness and fulness of Mr. Swainson's. No more with the thorough satisfaction of hitherto could he conduct the American traveller through the ancient crypt, or dilate upon the beauty of the quaint gargoyles to the Marquis of Bicester's visitors. No; indeed that railed-in spot was a plague-spot to him, ever itching, an eyesore even when invisible, a thing to be evaded and dodged and given the slip, as a Dean who is a Dean should scorn to evade anything mortal. He winced at the mere thought that the inquisitive sight-

seer might touch upon it, might probe the matter with questions. He hurried him past it with averted finger and voluble tongue, nor recovered his air of kindly condescension, or polished ease (as the case might be), until he was safe within his own hall. Only in moments of forgetfulness could the Dean now walk in his own Close of Bicester with the easy grace of old times.

But on this particular morning the sunshine was so pleasant, the wind so balmy, that he walked halfway across the Close as if the river of Lethe flowed fathoms deep over Mr. Swainson's plot; then it chanced that his eyes in a heedless moment rested upon it; and he saw that a man was at work in the tiny enclosure, and he paused. The Dean knew Mr. Swainson by this time, and did not trust him. What was this? By the man's side lay a small heap of greyish-white things, and he was holding a short-handled mallet, and was using it deftly to drive one of the greyish-white things into the ground. From him the Dean's eyes travelled to a couple of parti-coloured sticks, one at each end of the plot. What was this? A horror so terrible that the Dean stood still, and that remarkable change came over him which we have described.

Great men rise to the occasion. It was only a moment he thus stood and looked. Then he turned and walked rapidly back to a house he had just passed. A tall thin man was standing upon the steps, with the ghost of a smile upon his face. For a moment the Dean could only stammer. It was such a dreadful outrage.

'Is that,' he said at last, 'is that there, sir, being done by your authority?' With a shaking finger he pointed to Mr. Swainson's plot. The tall man in a leisurely manner settled a pair of eye-glasses upon his nose and looked in the direction indicated. 'Ah, I see what you mean,' he said at last with delicious coolness. 'Certainly, Mr. Dean, certainly!'

'Are you aware, sir, what it is?' gasped the clergyman; 'it is sacrilege!'

'Pooh, nothing of the kind, I assure you, my dear sir. It's croquet!'

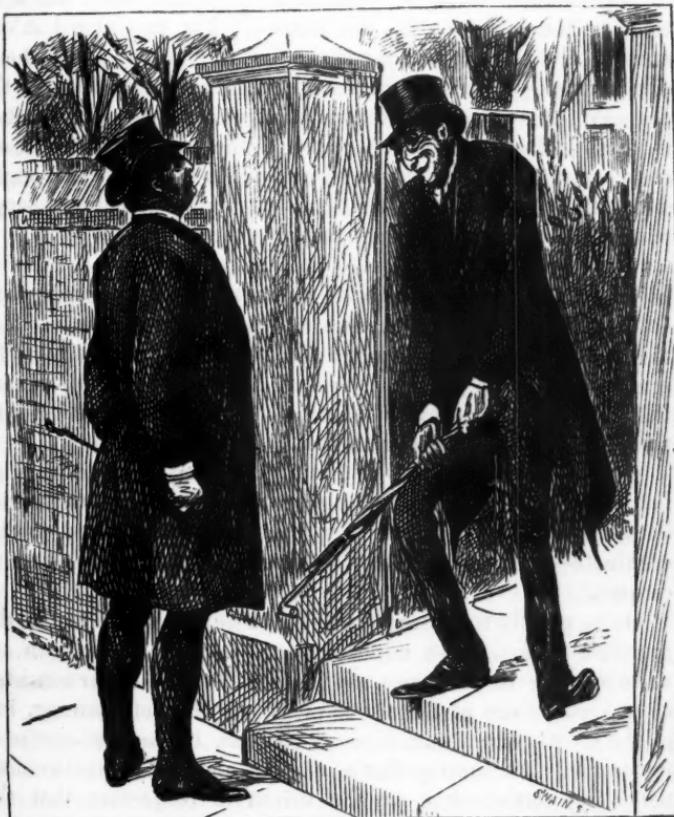
The tone was one of explanation, and there was such an air of frankness, of putting an end to an unfounded error, that the veins upon the Dean's temples swelled and his face grew, if possible, redder than before.

'I won't stay to bandy words with you——'

'Bandy!' cried the tall man, intensely amused. 'Ha, ha, ha!

you thought it was hocky! Bandy! Oh, no, you play it with hoops and a mallet. Drive the balls through—so!

And to the intense delight of the Close people, nine-tenths of whom were at their windows, Mr. Swainson executed an ungainly kind of gambade upon the steps. ‘Disgusting,’ the Dean called



it afterwards, when talking to sympathetic ears. Now he merely put it away from him with a wave of the hand.

‘I will not discuss it now, Mr. Swainson. If your own feelings of decency and of what is right and proper do not forbid this—this ribald profanity—I can call it nothing else, sir—I have but one word to add. The Chapter shall prevent it.’



'The Chapter!' replied the other in a tone of singular contempt, which changed to savageness as he continued, 'you are well read in history, Mr. Dean, they tell me. Doubtless you remember what happened when the puissant king Canute bade the tide come no further. I am the tide, and you and the Chapter sit in the chair of Canute.'

The Dean, it must be confessed, was a little taken aback by this terrible defiance. He was amazed. The two glared at one another, and the clergyman was the first to give way; baffled and disconcerted, yet still swelling with rage, he strode towards the deanery. His antagonist followed him with his eyes, then looked more airily than ever at his plot and the progress being made there, considered the weather with his chin at the decanal angle, and with a flirt of his long coat-tails went into the house, a happy man and the owner of a vastly improved appetite.

But the Dean had more to go through yet. At the door of his garden he ran in his haste against some one coming out. Ordinarily, great man as he was, he was also a gentleman. But this was too much. That, when the father had insulted him, the son should almost prostrate him on his own threshold, was intolerable—at any rate at a moment when he was smarting with the sense of unacknowledged defeat.

'Good morning, Mr. Dean,' said the young fellow, raising his hat with an evident desire to please that was the very antipodes of his sire's manner—only the Dean was in no mood to discriminate—'I have just been having a very pleasant game of croquet.'

It is greatly to be regretted, but here a short hiatus in the narrative occurs. The minor canons, than whom no men are more wanting in reverence, say that the Dean's answer consisted of two words, one of them very pithy, very full of meaning, but in the mouth of a Dean, however choleric, impossible—perfectly impossible. Accounting this as a gloss, and the original reading not being forthcoming, we are driven to conjecture that the Dean's answer expressed mild disapprobation of the game of croquet. Certain it is that young Swainson, surprised doubtless at so novel and original a sentiment, only said,

'I beg your pardon.'

'Hem! I mean to say that I do not approve of this. I will come to the point. I must ask you to discontinue your visits at my house.' The young man stared as if he thought the ex-

cited divine had gone mad ; the Deanery was almost a home to him. ‘Your father,’ the Dean went on more coherently, ‘has taken a step so unseemly, so—so indecent, has used language so insulting to me, sir, that I cannot, at any rate at present, receive you here.’

Young Swainson was a gentleman, and moreover, for a very good reason hereinafter appearing, the Dean failed to anger him. He raised his hat as respectfully as before, bowed slightly in token of acquiescence, and went on his way sorrowfully.

He had a singularly pleasant smile, this young gentleman, though this was not the time for displaying it. Mrs. Dean had once pronounced him a pippin grafted on a crab-stock, and thereafter in certain circles he was known as King Pepin. He was tall and straight and open-eyed, with faults enough, but of a generous youthful kind, easily overlooked and more easily forgiven. Doubtless Mr. Swainson would have had his son more practical, cool-headed, and precise ; but the shoot did not grow in the same way as the parent tree. Old Swainson would not have been happy without an enemy, nor young Swainson as happy with one ; and if, as the former often said, the latter’s worst enemy was himself, he was likely to have a tolerably prosperous life.

In a space of time inconceivably small the doings of the grim old lawyer and the Dean’s remonstrance were all over Bicester. Nay, fast as the stone had rolled, it had gathered moss. It was gravely asserted by people who rapidly grew to be eye-witnesses, that Mr. Swainson had danced a hornpipe in the middle of his plot, snapping his fingers at the Dean the while the latter prodded him as well as he could over the railings with his umbrella ; and that only the arrival of Mr. Swainson’s son put an end to this disgraceful exhibition.

Neither side wasted time. The Dean, the Canon in residence, and the Praeceptor, an active young fellow, consulted their legal adviser, and talked largely of ejectment, title, and seisin. Mr. Swainson, having nine points of the law in his favour, and as well acquainted with the tenth as his opponents’ legal adviser, devoted himself to the lighter pursuit of the mallet and hoop. In a state of felicity undreamt of before, he played, or affected to play, croquet, his right hand against his left, the former giving the latter two hoops and a cage. He played with a cage and a bell ; it was more cheerful, not to say noisy.

Of course all Bicester found occasion to pass through the Close

and see this great sight, while every window in the precincts was raised, that the denizens thereof might hear the tap, tap of the sacrilegious mallet. The Cathedral lawyer, urged to take some step, and well knowing the strength of the enemy's position, was fairly nonplussed. But while he pondered, with a certain grim



amusement, over Mr. Swainson's crotchet, which did not present itself to his legal mind in so dreadful a light as it did to the mind clerical, some unknown person took action, and made it war to the knife.

'Who did it?' Bicester asked loudly when it awoke one morning, to find Mr. Swainson in a state of mind which seemed

imperatively to call for a padded room and a strait waistcoat. During the night some one had thrown down the iron railing, taken up and broken his hoops, crushed his bell, and snapped his pegs; all this in the neatest possible manner, and with no damage to the turf. War to the knife indeed! Mr. Swainson, like the famous Widdrington, would have fought upon his stumps on such a provocation.

He expressed his opinion very hotly that this was the work of ‘that arrogant priest,’ and he should smart for it. A clergyman in this kind of context becomes a priest. This is common knowledge.

The Dean said, if hints were to go for anything, that it was a more or less direct interposition of Providence.

Young Swainson said nothing.

The vergers followed his example, but smiled a good deal.

The Dean’s lawyer said it was a very foolish act, whoever did it.

Mrs. Dean said she should like to give the man who did it five shillings. Perhaps her inclination mastered her.

The Dean’s daughter sighed.

And Bicester said everything except what young Swainson said.

I have not mentioned the Dean’s daughter before. It is the popular belief that she was christened Sweet Clive Buxton, and if people are mistaken in this, and the name ‘Sweet’ does not appear upon the highly favoured register, what of that? It is but one proof the more of the utter and tremendous want of foresight of godfathers and godmothers. They send the future lounger in St. James’s into the world handicapped with the name of Joseph or Zachary, and dub the country curate Tom or Jerry. No matter; Clive Buxton, whatever her name, could be nothing but sweet. She was not tall nor yet short; she was just as tall and just as short as she should have been, with a well-rounded figure and a grave carriage of the head. Her hair was wavy and brown, and sometimes it strayed over a white brow, on which a frown was so great a stranger that its right of entry was barred by the Statute of Limitations. There were a few freckles, etherealised dimples about her well-shaped nose. But these charms grew upon one gradually; at first her suitors were only conscious of her great grey wide-open eyes, so kind and frank and trustful, and so wise withal, that they filled every young man upon whom she turned them with a certainty of her purity and goodness and loveableness, and sent him away with a frantic desire to make her his wife without loss of time. With all this, she overflowed with fun and happiness—

except when she sighed—and she was just nineteen. Such was Sweet Clive Buxton then. If her picture were painted to-day, there would be this difference: she is older and more beautiful.

To return to our plot. Bicester watched with bated breath to see what Mr. Swainson would do. No culprit was forthcoming, and it seemed as if the day was going against him. He made no sign; only the broken hoops, the cage and battered bell, so lately the instruments and insignia of triumph, were cleared away and, at the ex-mayor's strenuous request, taken in charge by the police. Even the iron railing was removed. The excitement in the Close rose high. Once more the Cathedral vicinage was undefiled by lay appropriation, but the Dean knew Mr. Swainson too well to rejoice. The ground was cleared, it is true, but only, as he well foresaw, that it might be used for some mysterious operations, of which the end and aim only—his own annoyance—were clear to him, and not the means. What would Mr. Swainson do?

The strange unnatural calm lasted several days. The Cathedral dignitaries moved about in fear and trembling. At length one night the dwellers in the Close were aroused by a peculiar hammering. It was frequent, deep, and ominous, and came from the direction of Mr. Swainson's plot. To the nervous it seemed as the knocking of nails into an untimely coffin; to the guilty—and this was very near the Cathedral—like the noise of a rising scaffold; to the brave and those with clear consciences, such as Clive Buxton, it more nearly resembled the knocking a hoarding together. And indeed that was the very thing it was, and around Mr. Swainson's plot.

But what a hoarding! When the light of day discovered it to people's eyes, the Dean's fearful anticipations seemed slight to him, as the boy's vision who has dreamed he is about to be flogged in gaol, and awakes to find his father standing over him with a strap. It was so unsightly, so gaunt, so unpainted, so terrible; the very stones of the Cathedral seemed to blush a deeper red at discovering it, and the oldest houses to turn a darker purple. Had the Dean possessed the hundred tongues of Fame (which in Bicester possessed many more) and the five hundred fingers of Briareus, he could not hope to prevent the Marquis's visitors asking questions about *that*, or to divert the attention of the least curious American. He recognised the truth at a glance, and formed his plan. Many generals have formed it before; it was—retreat. He sent out his butler to borrow a continental Bradshaw from the

club, and shut himself up in his study. The truly great mind is never overwhelmed.

The vergers alone inspected the monster unmoved. They eyed it with glances not only of curiosity, but of appreciative intelligence. Not so, however, later in the day. Then Mr. Swainson appeared, leading by a strong chain a brindled bull-dog, of the most ferocious description and about sixty pounds weight. The animal contemplated the nearest verger with much satisfaction, and licked his chops; it might be at some grateful memory. The verger, who was in a small way a student of natural history, pronounced it however a lick of anticipation, and appeared not a little disconcerted. Mr. Swainson entered with the dog by a small door at the corner, and came out again without him. The other vergers then left.

Their coming and going was nothing to Mr. Swainson. It was enough for him that he stood there the cynosure of every eye in the Close; even Mrs. Dean was watching him from a distant garret window. In slow and measured fashion he walked to the steps of his own house, and, taking from them a board he had previously placed there, returned to the entrance of his plot, now enclosed to the height of about ten feet by this terrible hoarding. Above the door he carefully hung the board and drew back a few feet to take in the effect. Mrs. Dean sent down hastily for her opera-glasses, but really there was no need of them. The legend in huge black letters on a white ground ran thus: 'No Admittance! Beware of the Dog!!!' A smile of content crept slowly over Mr. Swainson's face, and he said aloud,

'Trump that card, Mr. Dean, if you can.'

As he turned—Mrs. Dean saw it distinctly and declared herself ready to swear to it in any court of justice—he snapped his fingers at the Deanery. And the dog howled!

It was the first of many howls, for he was a dog of great width of chest; and not even the surgeon of an insurance company, if he had lived twenty-four hours in Bicester Close, would have found fault with his lungs. Why he howled during the night, for it was not the time of full moon, became the burning question of each morning. That he joined in the Cathedral services with a zest and discrimination which rendered the organ almost superfluous, and drove the organist to the verge of resignation, was only to be expected. There was nothing strange in that, nor in his rivalry of the Præcentor's best notes, whose voice was considered very

fine in the Litany. The voluntary, Tiger made his own ; and of the sermon he expressed disapproval in so marked a manner that it was hard to say which swelled more with rage, the Dean within or the dog without. Their rage was equally impotent.

Things went so far that the Dean publicly wrung his hands at the breakfast-table. ‘ You could not hear the benediction this morning ? And I was in good voice too, my dear ! ’ he wailed, with tears in his eyes.

‘ You should appeal to the Marquis,’ suggested his wife. It must be explained that the Marquis in Bicester ranks next to and little beneath Providence. But the Dean shook his head. He put no faith in the power even of the Marquis to handle Mr. Swainson. ‘ I will lay it before the Bishop, my dear,’ he said humbly. And then, indeed, Mrs. Dean knew that the iron had entered into his soul, and that the hand of the Mayor of the Palace was very heavy upon him ; and her good, wifely heart grew so hot that she felt she could have no more patience with her daughter.

For Clive’s sympathies were no longer to be trusted. She was not the Sweet Clive of a month ago, but a sadder and more sedate young person, who had a troublesome and annoying way of defending the absent foe, and of sighing in dark corners, that was more than provoking. Duty demanded that she should be an ocean, into which her father and mother might pour the streams of their indignation and meet with a sympathising flood-tide, and lo ! this unfeeling girl declined to make herself useful in that way, and instead sent forth a ‘ bore ’ of light jesting that made little of the enemy’s enormities and a trifle of his outrages. More, she showed herself for the first time disobedient ; she altogether refused to promise not to speak to King Pepin if opportunity should serve, and, clever girl as she was, laughed her father out of insisting upon it, and kissed her mother into being a not unwilling ally. A wise woman was her mother and clear-sighted ; she saw that Clive had a spirit, but no longer a heart of her own. Yet at such a time as this, when her husband was wringing his hands, Clive’s insensibility to the family grievances tried Mrs. Dean sorely. It was hard that the Canon’s sleepless night, the Precentor’s peevishness, the singing man’s influenza, and all the countless counts of the indictment against Mr. Swainson, should fail to awaken in the young lady’s mind a tithe of the indignation shared by every other person at the Deanery, from the Dean himself to the scullery-

maid. But then love is blind ; for which most of us may thank Heaven.

Day after day went by and the hoarding still reared its gaunt height, and the unclean beast of the Hebrews still made night hideous, and the day a time for the expression of strong feelings. At length the Dean met his legal adviser in the Close—ay, and within a few feet of the obnoxious erection ; he kept his back to it with ridiculous care, while they talked.

‘We have come to something like a settlement at last,’ said the lawyer briskly ;—‘con-fusion take the dog ! I can hardly hear myself speak.—We are to meet at the Chapter House at five, Mr. Dean, if that will suit you : Mr. Swainson, the Bishop, Canon Rowcliffe, and myself. I think he is inclined to be reasonable at last.’

The Dean shook his head gloomily.

‘Ah, you will see it turn out better than you expect. Let me whisper something to you. There is an action commenced against him for shutting up a road across one of his farms at Middleton, and it will be fought stoutly. One suit at a time will be sufficient to satisfy even Mr. Swainson.’

‘You don’t say so ? This is good news !’ cried the Dean, with unmistakable pleasure. ‘Certainly, I will be there.’

‘And—I am sure I need not hint at it—you will be ready to meet Mr. Swainson half-way ?’

The Dean looked gloomy again. But at this moment a long loud howl, more frenzied, more fiendish than any which had preceded it, seemed to proclaim that the dog knew his reign was menaced, and, like Sardanapalus, was determined to go out right royally. It was more than the Dean could stand. With an involuntary motion of his hands to his ears, he nodded and fled with unseemly haste to a place less exposed, where he could in a seemly and decanal manner relieve his feelings.

The best-laid plans even of lawyers will go astray, and when they do so, the havoc is generally of a singularly wide-spread description. The meeting in the chapter-house proved stormy from the first. Whether it was that the writ in the right-of-way case had not yet reached Mr. Swainson, and so he clung to his only split-straw, or that the Dean was soured by want of sleep, or that the Bishop was not thorough enough—whatever was the cause, the spirit of compromise was absent, and the discussion across the chapter-house table threatened to make matters worse

and not better. Whether the Dean first called Mr. Swainson's enclosure the 'toadstool of a night,' or Mr. Swainson took the initiative by styling the Dean the 'mushroom of a day' (the Dean was not of old family), was a question afterwards much and hotly debated in Bicester circles. Be that as it may, the high powers at length rose from the table in dudgeon and much confusion.

There was behind the Dean at the end of the chapter-house a large window. It looked directly down upon what he, in the course of the discussion, had more than once termed 'The Profanation,' and since the eventful day of Mr. Swainson's match at croquet it had been, by the Dean's order, kept shuttered, to the intent that, when occupied in the chapter-house, the Profanation might not be directly before his eyes. On this occasion the shutter was still closed; it may be that this phenomenon had weakened Mr. Swainson's not over-robust resolves on the side of amity.

The Dean was a choleric man. As the party rose, he stepped to this shutter and flung it back. He turned to the others and said excitedly—

'Look, sir; look, my Lord! Is that a sight becoming the threshold of a cathedral? Is that a thing to be endured on consecrated ground?'

They stepped towards the window, a wide low-browed Tudor one, and looked out. The Dean himself stood aside, grasping the shutter with a hand that shook with passion. He could see the others' faces. He expected little show of shame or contrition on that of Mr. Swainson, but he did wish to bring this hideous thing home to the Bishop, who had not been as thorough in the matter as he should have been. Still, as a bishop, he could not see that thing there in its horrid reality and be unmoved!

No, he certainly could not. Slowly, and as if reluctantly, his lordship's face changed; it broke into a smile that broadened and rippled wider and wider, second by second, as he looked. His colour deepened until he became almost purple! And Mr. Swainson? His face was the picture of horror: there could not be a doubt of that. Confusion and astonishment were stereotyped on every feature. The Dean could not believe his own eyes. He turned in perplexity to the lawyer, who was peeping between the others' heads. His shoulders were shaking and his face was puckered with laughter.

The Bishop stepped back. ‘Really, gentlemen, I think it is hardly fair of us to play the spy. This is no place for us.’ He was a kindly man; there never was a more popular bishop in Bicester, and never will be.

At this the Canon and the lawyer lost all control over them-



selves, and their laughter, if not loud, was deep. The Dean was immensely puzzled, confused, perplexed, wholly angry. He did at last what he should have done at first, instead of striking an attitude with that shutter in his hand. He looked through the window himself. It was dusty, and he was somewhat near-sighted, but at length he saw; and this was what he saw.

In the further corner of the ugly enclosure, a couple of lovers billing and cooing ; about and around them Mr. Swainson's big dog performing uncouth gambols. Bad enough this ; but it was not all. The unsuspecting couple were Frank Swainson and—the Dean's daughter. Frank's arm was round her, and as the Dean looked, he stooped and kissed her, and Clive gazed with her brave eyes full of love into his and scarcely blushed.

When the Dean turned round he was alone.

Was it very wrong of them ? There was nowhere else, since this miserable fracas began, where, away from others' eyes, they could steal a kiss. But into Mr. Swainson's plot no window, save a shuttered one, could look ; the door, too, was close to one of the side doors of the cathedral, and you could pop in and out again unseen, and as for the big dog, Frank and Tiger were great friends. So if it was very wrong, it was very easy and very nice, and—*facilis descensus Averni*.

For one hour the Dean remained shut up in his study. At the end of that time he put on his hat and walked across the Close. He knocked at Mr. Swainson's door, and, upon its being opened, went in, and did not come out again for an hour and five minutes by Mrs. Canon Rowcliffe's watch. I have not the slightest idea of what passed there. More than two thousand different and distinct accounts of the interview were current next day in Bicester, but no one, and I have examined them all with care, seems to me to account for the undoubted results :—Imprimis, the disappearance next day from Mr. Swainson's plot of the famous hoarding, which was not even replaced by the old iron railing. Secondly, the marriage six weeks later of King Pepin and Sweet Clive.

